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VOLUME II.

THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1875

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THE

VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF

THE

VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF,

BY

MISS THACKERAY.

LONDON.

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE,

1875.

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DEDICATED TO HARRIET THACKERAY

Brighton, Jan. 27, 1867

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THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF.

PREFACE.

We have all of us in the course of our life's journeys sometimes lived for a little while in places which were wearisome and monotonous to us at the time; which had little to attract or to interest; we may have left them without regret, never even wishing to return. But yet as we have travelled away, we may have found that through some subtle and unconscious attraction, sights, sounds, and peculiarities which we thought we had scarcely noticed, seem to be repeating themselves in our brains; the atmosphere of the place seems to be haunting us, as though unwilling to let us escape. And this peculiar distinctness and vividness does not appear to wear out with time and distance. The pictures are like those of a magic-lantern, and come suddenly out of the dimness and darkness, starting into life when the lamp is lighted by some chance association; so clearly and sharply

defined and coloured, that we can scarcely believe that they are only reflections from old slides which have been lying in our store for years past.

The slides upon which this little history is painted, somewhat rudely and roughly, have come from Petitport in Normandy, a dull little fishing town upon the coast. It stands almost opposite to Ryde, in the Isle of Wight. The place is quite uninteresting, the district is not beautiful, but broad and fertile and sad and pleasant together. The country folks are high-spirited and sometimes gay, but usually grave, as people are who live by the sea. They are a well-grown, stately race, good-mannered, ready and shrewd in their talk and their dealings; they are willing to make friends, but they are at the same time reserved and careful of what they say. English people are little known at Petitport—one or two had stayed at the Château de Tracy 'dans le temps,' they told me, for Madame herself was of English parentage, and so was Madame Fontaine, who married from there. But the strangers who came to lodge in the place for the sake of the sea-bathing and the fine sands were from Caen and Bayeux for the most part, and only remained during a week or two.

Except just on fête days and while the bathing-time lasted, everything was very still at Petitport. Sometimes all the men would go away together in the boats, leaving the women and children alone in the village. I was

there after the bathing season was over, and before the first fishing fleet left. The fishermen's wives were all busy preparing provisions, making ready, sewing at warm clothes, and helping to mend the nets before their husbands' departure. I could see them hard at work through the open doors as I walked up the steep little village street.

There is a precipitous path at the farther end of the village, which leads down to the beach below. One comes to it by some steps which descend along the side of a smart little house built on the very edge of the cliff —a 'châlet' they call it. It has many windows and weathercocks, and muslin curtains and wooden balconies; and there is a sort of embankment or terrace-walk half-way to the sea. This was Madame Fontaine's châlet, the people told me—her husband had left it to her in his last will and testament—but she did not inhabit it. I had never seen any one come out of the place except once a fiercely-capped maid-servant with beetle brows, who went climbing up the hill beyond the châlet, and finally disappeared over its crest. It seemed as if the maid and the house were destined to be blown right away in time; all the winds came rushing across the fields and the country, and beating against the hill-side, and it was a battle to reach the steps which led down to the quiet below. A wide sea is heaving and flashing at one's feet,

as one descends the steep, the boats lie like specks on the shingle, birds go flying wind-blown below one's feet, and the rushing sound of the tide seems to fill the air. When I reached the foot of the cliff at last, I looked about for some place to rest. A young country-woman was sitting not far off on the side of a boat—a shabby old boat it was, full of water and sand and seaweed, with a patch of deal in its old brown coat. I was tired, and I went and sat down too.

The woman did not look round or make any movement, and remained quite still, a quiet figure against the long line of coast, staring at the receding tide. Some sailors not far off were shouting to one another, and busy with a fishing smack which they had dragged up high and dry, and safe from the water. Presently one of the men came plodding up over the shingle, and I asked him if he wanted his boat.

'Even if I wanted it, I should not think of disturbing you and Mademoiselle Reine,' answered the old fellow. He had a kindly puzzled weather-beaten face. 'Remain, remain,' he said.

'Hé, huh!' shouted his companions, filing off, 'come and eat.' But he paid no attention to their call, and went on talking. He had been out all night, but he had only caught cuttle-fish, he told me. They were not good to eat—they required so much beating before they could be cooked. They seize the boats with their long strag-

gling legs. . . . 'Did I hear of their clutching hold of poor old Nanon Lefebvre the other day, when she was setting her nets? Mademoiselle Reine could tell me the long and the short of it, for she was on the spot and called for help.'

'And you came and killed the beast, and there was an end of it,' said Mademoiselle Reine, shortly, glancing round with a pair of flashing bright eyes, and then turning her back upon us once more.

Hers was a striking and heroic type of physiognomy. She interested me then, as she has done ever since that day. There was something fierce, bright, good-humoured about her. There was a heart and strength and sentiment in her face—so I thought, at least, as she flashed round upon us. It is a rare combination, for women are not often both gentle and strong. She had turned her back again, however, and I went on talking to the old sailor. Had he had a good season—had he been fortunate in his fishing?

A strange doubting look came into his face, and he spoke very slowly. 'I have read in the Holy Gospels,' he said, turning his cap round in his hands, 'that when St. Peter and his companions were commanded to let down their nets, they enclosed such a multitude of fishes that their nets brake. I am sorry that the time for miracles is past. I have often caught fish, but my nets have never yet broken from the quantity they contained.'

'You are all preparing to start for Dieppe?' I said, to change the subject.

'We go in a day or two,' he answered; 'perhaps a hundred boats will be starting. We go here, we go there—may be at a league's distance. It is curious to see. We are drifting about; we ask one another, "Hast thou found the herring?" and we answer, "No! there is no sign:" and perhaps at last some one says, "It is at such-and-such a place." We have landmarks. We have one at Asnelles, for instance;' and he pointed to the glittering distant village, on the tongue of land which jutted into the sea at the horizon. 'And then it happens,' said the old fellow, 'that all of a sudden we come upon what we are searching for. . . . We have enough then, for we find them close-packed together, like this;' and he pressed his two brown hands against one another.

'And is not that a miracle to satisfy you, Christophe Lefebvre?' said the woman, speaking in a deep sweet voice, with a strange ringing chord in it, and once more flashing round.

'Ah, mademoiselle,' he said, quite seriously, 'they are but herrings. Now St. Peter caught trout in his nets. I saw that in the picture which you showed me last Easter, when I went up to Tracy. I am only a rough man,' he went on, speaking to me again. 'I can't

speak like those smart gentlemen from Paris, who make "calembours," and who have been to college; you must forgive me if I have offended you, or said anything wrongly. I have only been to one school in our little village; I learnt what I could there. . . .'

'And to that other school, Christophe,' said the deep voice again; and the young woman pointed to the sea.

Then he brightened up. 'There, indeed, I have learnt a great many things, and I defy any one of those fine gentlemen to teach me a single fact regarding it.'

'And yet there are some of them—of the fine gentlemen, as you call them,' she said, looking him full in the face, 'who are not out of place on board a boat, as you ought to know well enough.'

Lefebvre shrugged his shoulders. 'Monsieur Richard,' he said, 'and M. de Tracy too, they liked being on board, and were not afraid of a wetting. Monsieur Fontaine, pauvre homme, it was not courage he wanted. Vous n'avez pas tort, Mademoiselle Reine. Permit me to ask you if you have had news lately of the widow? She is a good and pretty person' (he said to me), 'and we of the country all like her.'

'She is good and pretty as you say,' answered the young woman, shortly. 'You ask me for news, Christophe. I heard some news of her this morning; they say

Madame Fontaine is going to be married again.' And then suddenly turning away, Mademoiselle Reine rose abruptly from her seat, and walked across the sands out towards the distant sea.

CHAPTER I.

ADIEU, CHARMANT PAYS.

Was it a vision or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

FIVE O'CLOCK on a fine Sunday,—western light streaming along the shore, low cliffs stretching away on either side, with tufted grasses and thin straggling flowers growing from the loose arid soil,—far-away promontories, flashing and distant shores, which the tides have not yet overlapped, all shining in the sun. The waves swell steadily inwards, the foam sparkles where the ripples meet the sands.

The horizon is solemn dark blue, but a great streak of light crosses the sea; three white sails gleam, so do the white caps of the peasant women, and the wings of the seagulls as they go swimming through the air.

Holiday people are out in their Sunday clothes. They go strolling along the shore, or bathing and screaming to each other in the waters. The countrymen wear their blue smocks of a darker blue than the sea, and they walk by their wives and sweethearts in their gay-coloured

Sunday petticoats. A priest goes by; a grand lady in frills, yellow shoes, red jacket, fly-away hat, and a cane. Her husband is also in scarlet and yellow. Then come more women and Normandy caps flapping, gossiping together, and baskets and babies, and huge umbrellas. A figure, harlequin-like, all stripes and long legs, suddenly darts from behind a rock, and frisks into the water, followed by a dog barking furiously. More priests go by from the seminary at Asnelles. Then perhaps a Sister of Charity, with her large flat shoes, accompanied by two grand-looking bonnets.

I believe M. le Sous-préfet himself had been seen on the sands that afternoon, by Marion, by Isabeau, by Madame Potier, and all the village in short. M. le Maire had also been remarked walking with the English gentleman from the château; one pair of eyes watched the two curiously as they went by. The little Englishman was sauntering in his odd loose clothes; Monsieur Fontaine, the maire, tripping beside him with short, quick military steps, neat gaiters, a cane, thread gloves, and a curly-rimmed Panama hat. M. Fontaine was the taller of the two, but the Englishman seemed to keep ahead somehow, although he only sauntered and dragged one leg lazily after the other. Pélottier the innkeeper had been parading up and down all the afternoon with his rich and hideous bride. She went mincing along with a parasol and mittens and gold earrings and a great gold ring on

her forefinger, and a Paris cap stuck over with pins and orange-flowers. She looked daggers at Reine Chrétien, who had scorned Pélottier, and boxed his great red ears, it was said, earrings and all. As for Reine, she marched past the couple in her Normandy peasant dress, with its beautiful old laces, and gold ornaments, looking straight before her, as she took the arm of her grandfather, the old farmer from Tracy.

Besides all these grown-up people there comes occasionally a little flying squadron of boys and girls, rushing along, tumbling down, shouting and screaming at the pitch of their voices, to the scandal of the other children who are better brought up, and who are soberly trotting in their small bourrelets and bibs and blouses by the side of their fathers and mothers. The babies are the solemnest and the funniest of all, as they stare at the sea and the company from their tight maillots or cocoons.

The country folks meet, greet one another cheerfully, and part with signs and jokes; the bathers go on shouting and beating the water; the lights dance. In the distance, across the sands, you see the figures walking leisurely homewards before the tide overtakes them; the sky gleams whiter and whiter at the horizon, and bluer and more blue behind the arid grasses that fringe the overhanging edges of the cliffs.

Four or five little boys come running up one by one,

handkerchief-flying, umbrella-bearer ahead, to the martial sound of a penny trumpet.

The little captain pursues them breathless and exhausted, brandishing his sword in an agony of command. 'Soldats,' he says, addressing his refractory troops,—'Soldats, souvenez-vous qu'il ne faut jamais courir. Soldats, ne courez pas, je vous en prrrrie—une, deux, trois,' and away they march to the relief of a sand fort which is being attacked by the sea. And so the day goes on and the children play—

> Among the waste and lumber of the shore,
> Hard coils of cordage, swarthy fishing nets,
> Anchors of rusty fluke, and boats updrawn.

And while they build 'their castles of dissolving sand to watch them overflow,' the air, and the sounds, and the colours in which all these people are moving, seem to grow clearer and clearer; you can see the country people clambering the cliffs behind the village, and hear the voices and the laughter of the groups assembled on the embanked market-place. And meanwhile M. le Maire and the Englishman are walking slowly along the sands towards Tracy—with long grotesque shadows lengthening as the sun begins to set.

'I hope you will revisit our little town before long,' M. Fontaine was politely remarking to his companion. 'I hear that you start to-morrow, and that Madame de Tracy accompanies you.'

'My aunt declares she cannot possibly go alone,' said the Englishman, shrugging his shoulders, and speaking in very good French for an Englishman, 'or I should have been glad to stay another week.'

'You have not yet visited the oyster-park at Courseulles,' said M. le Maire, looking concerned. 'It is a pity that you depart so soon.'

'I am very unfortunate to miss such a chance,' said the Englishman smiling.

The Maire of Petitport seemed to think this a most natural regret. 'Courseulles is a deeply-interesting spot,' he said. 'Strangers travel from far to visit it. You have nothing of the sort in your country, I believe? You would see the education of the oyster there brought to its highest point of perfection. They are most intelligent animals, I am assured; one would not have imagined it. You would see them sorted out according to size, in commodious tanks. Every variety is there—from enormous patriarchal oysters to little baby ones, *en maillot*, I may say. The returns are enormous, I believe. And then you have such a fine air at Courseulles; magnificent plains—a vast horizon—no trees, nothing to interrupt the coup-d'œil. The effect of the moon shining on the marshes and the establishment is really striking.'

'I think old Chrétien has a share in the concern,' said the Englishman.

'Mademoiselle Reine and her grandfather are very

reserved upon the subject, and I have never been able to ascertain exactly what their yearly percentage amounts to,' said Fontaine, confidentially holding up one thin hand. 'I know that she drives over once a month in her spring-cart, to superintend the affairs. She is a person, as you are aware, of great method and order; and, indeed, in affairs, it is absolutely necessary.'

'She seems to manage the farm very fairly,' said the other. 'Old Chrétien is a stupid old fellow, always drinking cider; he don't seem to do much else.'

'Alas, no!' replied Fontaine. 'I look upon drunkenness as a real misfortune. He has told me in confidence that he cannot exist without the stimulant of cider. Even Mademoiselle Reine cannot persuade him to abandon it.'

'I cannot imagine anybody having any difficulty in refraining from cider,' said the other, smiling again. 'She was good to give me some the other day, with soupe aux choux; and I confess ——'

'Comment, Monsieur Butler! You do not like our cider?' said the maire, looking quite surprised. 'It is because you have the taste of your "*potter*" still in your mouth. Come back to us, and I promise to convert you.'

'Very well, that is a bargain,' said Butler, looking about him a little distractedly. Madame Pélottier, who happened to be passing, imagined that he was admiring

her elegance. She drew herself up, stuck out her forefinger, and bowed. The maire, with a brisk glissade, returned the salute.

'I sometimes ask,' Fontaine remarked, as he replaced his curly-rimmed hat, 'how that excellent fellow, Pélottier, can have married himself with that monstrous person. She brought him, it is true, an excellent dot and a good connection at Caen, also at Bayeux; but in his place nothing would have persuaded me to unite myself with a young lady so disgracious and ill brought-up.'

'Then you have thought of marrying again?' asked Butler, glancing at the spruce figure beside him.

The maire looked conscious, and buttoned his coat. 'I once contemplated some proposals,' he said, 'to a person who was well-off, and who might have made an amiable mother to my child, but the affair came to nothing. I do not mind telling you it was Mademoiselle Chrétien herself that I had in view. After all, why should I marry? Hein? My good mother takes care of my little son; my father-in-law is much attached to him; I have an excellent cuisinière, entirely devoted to our family—you know, Justine? Sometimes,' said M. Fontaine, gazing at the sea, 'a vague feeling comes over me that, if I could find a suitable person, life might appear less monotonous, more interesting. I should feel more gay, in better spirits, with the society of an agreeable companion. These are mere reveries, the emotions of a

poetic imagination; for where am I to find the person?'

'Is there much difficulty?' said Butler, amused.

'I do not generally mention it, but I do not mind telling you,' said M. le Maire, 'that our family, through misfortunes—by the stupidity of some, the ill-conduct of others—no longer holds the place in society to which it is entitled. But I do not forget that I belong to an ancient race. I would wish for a certain refinement in my future companion which I cannot discover among the ladies of the vicinity. There is nothing to suit me at Bayeux; at Caen I may possibly discover what I require. I shall certainly make inquiries on my next visit.'

'And so you did not arrange matters with Mademoiselle Reine?' said the Englishman.

'Steps were taken,' M. Fontaine replied, mysteriously nodding his head, 'but without any result. I for one do not regret it. With all her excellent qualities and her good blood—her mother was of a noble house, we all know—there is a certain abruptness—in a word, Mademoiselle Reine is somewhat bourgeoise in her manner, and I am not sorry that the transaction fell through. Old Père Chrétien required me to produce a sum out of all reason. Neither he nor Mademoiselle Reine were in the least accommodating —— Ha, Madame Michaud—Madame!' a bow, a flourish of the Panama to a stout old lady with a clean cap and a parasol. The maire had held Butler

fast for the last hour, and might have gone on chattering indefinitely if the Englishman, seeing him involved with his new friend, had not pulled out his watch and escaped, saying he must go home. The maire took a disconsolate leave. Nemesis, in the shape of Madame Michaud, with some wrongs and a great deal to say about them, had overtaken Monsieur le Maire and held him fast prisoner, while Richard Butler marched off with that odd sauntering walk of his, and made the best of his way to the château.

He tramped along the foot of the cliff, crunching over seaweed and stones and mussel-shells. He passed old Nanette Lefebvre trimming her nets, sitting in a heap on the sand, with her bare legs in huge wooden sabots, and her petticoats tucked up. Though it was a fête day, the old fish-wife could not afford to miss her chance of a *bonne aubaine.* 'J'allons mettre mes filets à la basse marée,' said Nanon, quite contented. 'Je vous souhaïte le bonsoïr, mon petit monsieur.' Mr. Hook might have made a pretty sketch of the old brown face with the shrewd black eyes, and the white coif, of the crisp rocks, the blue sea, and the tattered striped petticoat. A peculiar brightness and clearness of atmosphere is like a varnish to the live pictures one meets with at every turn on the shores yonder. The colours are fainter and brighter than in England, the backgrounds lie flat, undiversified, scantily broken by trees, but the figures stand

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out in pale relief, with a grace, an unconscious pastoral sentiment which is almost unknown among us. Have we not outgrown the charm of tradition, old songs and saws, and ways and appliances, national dress, and simple country life? Faded, battered wire bonnets; vulgarity, millinery, affectation, parasols, crinolines — it seems strange that such things should so surely supersede in time all the dear and touching relics of the bygoing still life of our ancestors. Perhaps a day will come when the old charm will exorcise the land again, bringing back its songs and rural poetry, its grace and vanishing sentiment.

It almost appears as if consciousness destroyed and blighted whatever it laid its fatal hand upon. We have all learnt to love and admire art in our daily life, and to look for it here and there; but as we look, somehow, and as we exclaim,—Here or there behold it!—the fairies vanish, the birds fly away, the tranquil silence is broken, the simple unconsciousness is gone for ever, and you suddenly awake from your pleasant dream. A ruin enclosed by a wall and viewed with a ticket, a model old woman in a sham rustic cottage at the park gate; even the red cloaks of the village children which the lady of the hall brought down from Marshall and Snelgrove's, when she was in town last Tuesday—all these only become scenes in a pantomime somehow. In these days, one is so used to sham and imitation, and Brummagem,

that when by chance one comes to the real thing, it is hard to believe in it. At least, so Butler thought, as he trudged along.

Presently he began to climb the cliff, and he reached the top at last with the great fields and the sea on either side, and the fresh breezes blowing. He did not go into the village, but turned straight off and strode up the hill. He passed groups all along the road, resting or plodding through the dust. The west was all aglow with sunset; great ranges of cloud mountains were coming from a distance and hanging overhead in the sky. He beheld fiery lakes, calm seas, wonderful countries. He could see land and sky and sea glowing for miles and miles in wreathing vapours of loveliest tint, and golden sunfloods. Butler trudged along, admiring, wondering, and at the same time with his head full of one thing and another.

He was loth enough to go, but there was no help for it. He had been in scrapes and troubles at home, and had come away for a change, and now he felt he should get into a scrape if he stayed, and they had sent for him home again. His uncle, Charles Butler, had paid his debts once more, and his uncle Hervey had written him a lofty and discursive epistle conveying his forgiveness, desiring him to come back to his work and his studio. His aunt, Madame de Tracy, announced that she would accompany him to England, spend a short time with her two brothers, and make the way smooth for her nephew.

Madame de Tracy had but ten fingers, but if she had possessed twenty she would have wished to make use of each one of them in that culinary process to which the old proverb alludes. Her efforts had never been successful as far as Butler was concerned.

Dick, as his friends call him, had been cursed with a facility for getting into scrapes all his lifetime. He had an odd fantastic mind, which had come to him no one knew how or why. He was sensitive, artistic, appreciative. He was vain and diffident; he was generous and selfish; he was warm-hearted, and yet he was too much a man of the world not to have been somewhat tainted by its ways. Like other and better men, Dick's tastes were with the aristocracy, his sympathies with the people. He was not strong enough to carry out his own theories, though he could propound them very eloquently, in a gentle drawling voice, not unpleasant to listen to. He was impressionable enough to be easily talked over and persuaded for a time, but there was with it all a fund of secret obstinacy and determination which would suddenly reassert itself, at inconvenient moments sometimes. In that last scrape of his, Dick having first got deeply into debt, in a moment of aberration had proposed to a very plain but good-natured young lady with a great deal of money. He had made the offer at the instigation of his relations, and to quiet them and deliver himself from their persecutions, and he then behaved shamefully, as it is called, for he

was no sooner accepted, to his surprise and consternation, than he wrote a very humble but explicit note to the heiress, telling her that the thing was impossible. That she must forgive him if she could, but he felt that the mercenary motives which had induced him to come forward were so unworthy of her and of himself, that the only course remaining to him was to confess his meanness and to throw himself upon her good-nature. Poor Dick! the storm which broke upon his curly head was a terrible one. He had fled in alarm.

His curly head had stood him in stead of many a better quality; his confidence and good manners had helped him out of many a well-deserved scrape, but he was certainly no sinewy hero, no giant, no Titan, like those who have lately revisited the earth—(and the circulating libraries, to their very great advantage and improvement). So far he was effeminate that he had great quickness of perception, that he was enthusiastic and self-indulgent, and shrunk from pain for himself or for others. He had been petted and spoiled in his youth, and he might have been a mere puppet and walking gentleman to this day, if it had not been for that possession, that odd little craze in his mind which seemed to bring him to life somehow, and force him into independence and self-denial; and Charles Butler, his eldest uncle, used to make jokes at him, or occasionally burst out in a fume when Dick gravely assured him he believed

himself possessed and unaccountable for his actions. But for all his vexation, the old man could not resist the young fellow's handsome face, and his honest unaffected ways, and his cleverness and his droll conceit, and humility, and grateful ingratitude, so to speak. His scrapes, after all, were thoughtless, not wicked ones, and so old Butler paid and paid, and preached a little, and jibed a great deal, and offered him regular employment, but Dick would not be regularly employed, would not be helped, would not be made angry; it seemed all in vain to try to influence him.

'If your pictures were worth the canvas,' the old fellow would say, 'I should be only too thankful to see you so harmlessly occupied: but what is this violet female biting an orange, and standing with her toes turned in and her elbows turned out? P. R. B's. I have no patience with the nonsense. Pray, were Sir Joshua, and Lawrence, and Gainsborough, and Romney, before Raphael or after? and could they paint a pretty woman, or could they not?'

'They could paint in their way,' Dick would answer, twirling his moustache, 'and I probably can appreciate them better than you can, sir. You haven't read my article in the "Art Review," I see.' And then the two would talk away at one another for an hour or more. It all ended in Dick going his own way, wasting his time, throwing away opportunities, picking up shreds that he

seemed to have thrown away, making friends wherever he went, with the children of light or of darkness, as the case might be.

As Dick walked along the high-road to Tracy this afternoon, he replied to one greeting and another; good-humoured looking women, stepping out by their men companions, grinned and nodded to him as they passed on; children trotting along the road cried out, 'Bon-soir,' in the true Normandy sing-song. Butler occasionally interrupted his somewhat remorseful meditations to reply to them. 'What a fool he was!' he was thinking. Alas! this is often what people are thinking as they walk for a little way alone along the high-road of life. How he had wasted his youth, his time, his chances. Here he was, at eight-and-twenty, a loiterer in the race. He had tried hard enough at times, but life had gone wrong with him somehow. 'Why was he always in trouble?' poor Butler asked himself; 'dissatisfied, out of pocket and temper? Why was he unhappy now when matters were beginning to brighten, and one more chance offered itself for him to retrieve the past?' He had a terror lest the future should only be a repetition of times gone by—thoughtless imprudence, idleness, recklessness. He thought if he could turn his back upon it all, and take up a new life under another name, he would be well content,—if he could put on a blouse and dig in the fields like these sunburnt fellows, and forget all cares and anxieties and

perplexities in hard physical labour and fatigue. A foolish passionate longing for the simpler forms of life had come over him of late. He was sick of cities, of men, of fine ladies, of unsuccessful efforts, of constant disappointment and failure. He was tired of being tired and of the problems of daily life which haunted and perplexed him. Here, perhaps, he might be at peace, living from day to day and from hour to hour.

And yet he felt that the best and truest part of him, such as it was, was given to his art, and that he would sacrifice everything, every hope for better things, if he sacrificed to weariness, to laziness,—to a fancy,—what he would not give up for expediency and success. He was no genius, he could not look for any brilliant future; he was discouraged and out of heart. He blinked with his short-sighted eyes across the country towards a hollow far away, where a farmstead was nestling; he could see the tall roof gleaming among the trees and the stacks. How loth he was to go! He imagined himself driving cattle to market along the dusty roads; bargaining; hiring labourers, digging drains, tossing hay into carts; training fruit-trees, working in the fields. It was an absurdity, and Butler sighed, for he knew it was absurd. He must go, whether he would or not; he had seen the last of the place and the people in it; he had tasted of the fruit of the tree of good and of evil—it was too late, he could not be Adam living with his Eve in the Garden of Eden.

It was a garden full of apples, bounteous, fruitful, which was spread out before him, stretching from the lilac hills all down to the sea, but it was not the Garden of Eden. Had Eve bright quick brown eyes, Butler wondered; did she come and go busily? did she make ciders and salads, and light fires of dried sticks in the evenings? Did she carefully pick up the fruit that fell to the ground and store it away? did she pull flowers to decorate her bower with, and feed the young heifers with leaves out of her hand? Did she scatter grain for the fowls of the air? did she call all the animals by their names and fondle them with her pretty slim fingers? did she, when they had been turned out of Paradise, weave garments for herself and for Adam with a spinning-wheel, as Butler had seen the women use in these parts? Had she a sweet odd voice with a sort of chord in it? Dick sighed again and walked on quickly, watching a great cloud-ship high overhead. And as he walked writing his cares with his footsteps on the dust, as Carlyle says somewhere, a cart which had been jolting up the hillside passed him on the road.

It was full of country-people: a young man with a flower stuck into his cap was driving, an old man was sitting beside him. Inside the cart were three women and some children. One little fellow was leaning right over, blowing a big trumpet and holding a flag. The other children were waving branches and pulling at a

garland of vine-leaves, of which one end was dragging, baskets were slung to the shafts below, two dogs were following and barking, while the people in the cart were chaunting a sort of chorus as they went jolting along the road.

They sang while the children waved their branches in accompaniment. It looked like a christening party with the white ribbons and flowers. One of the young women held a little white baby in her arms: another sat as if she was in a boat, holding fast a pretty little curly-headed girl, while the other arm dropped loosely over the side.

As the cart jogged past him, the children recognised Butler, who was well known to them, and they began to call to him and to wave their toys to attract his attention. The two men took off their caps, the women nodded, and went on singing; all except the young woman who had been leaning back—she looked up, smiled, and made the little girl next her kiss her hand to the wayfarer.

'Good-by, Reine,' said Butler, in English, starting forward. 'I'm going to-morrow.'

Reine, jogging away, did not seem to understand what he said—she stretched out her long neck, half turned to the others, then looked back again at Dick. The other two women did not heed her, but went on shrilly chaunting—

Si le chemin nous ennuie,
L'un à l'autre nous boirons!

And a second verse—

Voici tous gens de courage
Lesquels s'en vont en voyage
Jusque par-delà des monts
Faire ce pélerinage.
Tous boire nous ne pouvons.
Que la bouteille on n'oublie.
En regrettant Normandie,
En regrettant . . . .

went the chorus with the men's voices joining in. There was a sudden decline in the hill, and the horse, that had been going slowly before, set off at a trot. Reine was still leaning back and looking after Butler. Dick never turned his head as he walked quietly on towards Tracy. It seemed to him as if the sun had set suddenly, and that a cold east wind was coming up from the sea.

The cart jogged off towards the farmstead which Dick had seen nestling among the trees—Dick went on his road through the growing dusk. About half an hour later, Madame Michaud, belated and in a great hurry, drove past him in her little open gig; she pulled up, however, to offer him a lift, which Butler declined with thanks.

The road makes a sudden turn about a mile before you reach the château, and Dick could perceive the glow of the windows of the old place already beginning to light up. He could also see a distant speck of light in the plain, shining through darker shadow. Had Reine reached home, he wondered? was that the flare of the

Colza blaze through the open door of the dwelling, or the lamp placed in the window as a signal to Dominique and her grandfather that the supper was ready? 'It is as well I am going to-morrow,' Butler ruefully thought once more.

It was almost dark by the time he reached the iron gates of the Château de Tracy, where his dinner was cooking, and his French relations were awaiting his return. They were sitting out—dusky forms of aunts and cousins—on chairs and benches, upon the terrace in front of the old place, enjoying the evening breeze, fresh though it was. English people would have huddled into cloaks and bonnets, or gathered round close up to the wood-fire in the great bare saloon on a night like this; but French people are less cautious and chilly than we are, and indeed there are no insidious damps lurking in the keen dry atmosphere of Normandy, no hidden dangers to fear as with us. To-night the mansarde windows in the high roof, the little narrow windows in the turret, and many of the shuttered casements down below were lighted up brightly. The old house looked more cheerful than in the daytime, when to English eyes a certain mouldiness and neglect seemed to hang about the place. Persons passing by at night when the lamps were lighted, travellers in the diligence from Bayeux, and other wayfarers, sometimes noticed the old château blazing by the roadside, and speculated dimly,—as people do when they

see signs of an unknown life,—as to what sort of people were living, what sort of a history was passing, behind the grey walls. There would be voices on the terrace, music coming from the open windows. The servants clustering round the gates, after their work was over, would greet the drivers of the passing vehicles. As the diligence pulled up, something would be handed down, or some one would get out of the interior, and vanish into this unknown existence—the cheerful voices would exchange good-nights. . . . When Richard Butler first came he arrived by this very Bayeux diligence, and he was interested and amused as he would have been by a scene at the play.

It was by this same Bayeux diligence that he started early the next morning after his walk along the cliff. Madame de Tracy, who always wanted other people to alter their plans suddenly at the last moment, and for no particular reason, had endeavoured to persuade her nephew to put off his departure for twenty-four hours. But Dick was uneasy, and anxious to be off. He had made up his mind that it was best to go, and this waiting about and lingering was miserable work. Besides, he had received a letter from a friend, who was looking out for him at a certain modest little hotel at Caen, well known to them both. Dick told his aunt that he would stay there and wait until she came the next day, but that he should leave Tracy by the first diligence in the

morning; and for once he spoke as if he meant what he said.

And so it was settled, and Richard packed up his picture overnight, and went off at seven o'clock, without his breakfast, in the rattling little diligence. An unexpected pleasure was in store for him. He found M. Fontaine already seated within it, tightly wedged between two farmers' wives, who were going to market with their big baskets and umbrellas, and their gold earrings and banded caps. M. le Maire was going into Bayeux, '*pour affaire*,' he informed the company. But Richard Butler was silent, and little inclined for the conversation which M. Fontaine tried to keep up as well as he could through the handles of the baskets with his English friend, with the other occupants of the vehicle, and with the ladies on his right and his left. He suited his subjects to his auditory. He asked Madame Nicholas if she was going to the fair at Creuilly, and if she had reason to believe that there would be as much amusement there this year as the last. He talked to Madame Binaud of the concert in the church the week before, and of the sum which M. le Curé had cleared by the entertainment. To Dick he observed, in allusion to his intended journey, 'What a wonderful power is *le steam!* You can, if you choose, dine at Paris to-night, and breakfast in London to-morrow morning. What should we do,' asked

Fontaine, 'without the aid of this useful and surprising invention?'

'Eh bien! moi qui vous parle, Monsieur le Maire,' said Madame Binaud—'I have never yet been in one of those machines à vapeur, nor do I ever desire to go. Binaud, he went up to Paris last harvest-time, and he came back, sure enough. But I don't like them,' said Madame Binaud, shaking her head, and showing her white teeth.

Madame Binaud was a Conservative. She was very stout, and wore a high cap with big flaps that were somewhat out of date. Madame Nicholas was a bright, lively little woman, with a great store of peaches in her basket, a crinoline, a Paris cap, and all the latest innovations.

They went on slowly climbing the hill for some time, and as they turned a corner, Dick caught one more sight of Petitport, all white against the blue sea, and very distinct in the early morning light. Then the diligence rolled on more quickly, and the great towers of Bayeux Cathedral came rising across the plain. Butler looked back again and again, but he could see the village no more. What was the charm which attracted him so strangely to the poor little place? he asked himself. Did he love the country for its own sake, or only for the sake of the people he left there? But the diligence was banging and rattling over the Bayeux stones by this time, and it was no use asking himself any more questions.

'Monsieur,' solemnly said Madame Binaud, as she and her friend prepared to get down, 'I wish you a very good journey.'

'Bon jour, messieurs!' said Madame Nicholas, cheerfully, while M. Fontaine carefully handed out the ladies' baskets and umbrellas, and a pair of sabots belonging to Madame Binaud.

The maire himself descended at the banker's. It was an old-fashioned porte-cochère, leading into a sunny, deserted courtyard. M. Fontaine stood in the doorway. He was collecting his mind for one last parting effort. 'My dear fren'! good voyage,' he said in English, waving his Panama, as Dick drove off to the station.

M. Fontaine accomplished his business, and jogged back to Petitport in the diligence that evening, once more in company with Madame Binaud, and Madame Nicholas, who had disposed of her peaches.

'Il est gentil, le petit monsieur Anglais,' said Madame Nicholas. 'Anglais, Allemand; c'est la même chose, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur Fontaine?'

'Not at all, not at all; the nations are entirely distinct,' says Fontaine—delighted to have an opportunity of exhibiting his varied information before the passengers.

'I should like to know where he has got to by this time,' said Madame Binaud, solemnly nodding her stupid old head.

Dick is only a very little way off, sitting upon a pile, and saying farewell for a time to the country he loves. 'Adieu, charmant pays de France,' he is whistling somewhat dolefully.

There is a river, and some people are sitting on some logs of wood which have been left lying along the embankment, there is a dying sunstreak in the west, and the stars are quietly brightening overhead. The water reflects the sunstreak and the keels of the ships which are moored to the quai. Beyond the quai the river flows across a plain, through grey and twilight mystery towards Paris with its domes and triumphal arches miles and miles away. Here, against the golden vaulted background, crowd masts and spires and gable-roofs like those of a goblin city, and casements from which the lights of the old town are beginning to shine and to be reflected in the water.

The old town whose lights are kindling is Caen in Normandy. The people who are sitting on the logs are some country folks, and two English travellers who have strolled out with their cigars after dinner.

It seems a favourite hour with the Caenois; many townsfolk are out and about. They have done their day's work, their suppers are getting ready by the gleaming gable lights, and before going in to eat, to rest, to sleep, they come to breathe the cool air, to look at the shipping, to peer down into the dark waters, and to stroll under

the trees of the Cours. The avenues gloom damp and dark and vaporous in the twilight, but one can imagine some natures liking to walk under trees at night and to listen to the dreary chirping of the crickets. For English people who have trees and shady groves at home, there are other things to do at Caen besides strolling along the dark Cours. There are the quais, and the quaint old courts and open squares, and the busy old streets all alight and full of life. They go climbing, descending, ascending with gables and corners, where shrines are and turrets with weathercocks, and bits of rag hanging from upper windows; carved lintels, heads peeping from the high casements, voices calling, pigeons flying and perching, flowers hanging from topmost stories, and then over all these the upward spires and the ivy-grown towers of the old castle standing on the hill, and down below crumbling Roman walls and green moats all luxuriant with autumn garlands. All day long the bright Norman sky had been shining upon the gardens and hill-sides, and between the carved stones and parapets and high roofs of the city.

Richard Butler had been wandering about all the afternoon in this pleasant confusion of sight, and sound, and bright colour. He had missed the friend he expected to meet, but this did not greatly affect him, for he knew he would turn up that night at the hotel—at the table-d'hôte most likely; and, in the meantime, wandering round

and about, stopping at every corner, looking into every church, noting the bright pictures, framed as it were in the arches, staring up at the gables, at the quaint wares in the shops; making mental notes of one kind and another, which might be useful some day—he had spent a tranquil solitary afternoon. He had seen a score of subjects; once sitting on a bench in one of the churches, a side door had opened, and with a sudden flood of light from a green courtyard outside, an old bent woman came in, carrying great bunches of flowers. She came slowly out of the sunlight, and went with dragging step to the altar of the beautiful white Virgin, where the tapers were burning. And then she placed the flowers on the altar and crept away. Here was a subject, Butler thought, and he tried to discover why it affected him. A pretty young girl tripping in, blushing with her offering and her petition, would not have touched him as did the sight of this lonely and aged woman, coming sadly along with her fresh wreaths and nosegays. 'Poor soul! what can she have to pray for?' 'Her flowers should be withered immortelles,' he thought, but the combinations of real life do not *pose* for effect, and the simple, natural incongruities of every day are more harmonious than any compositions or allusions, no matter how elaborate. Butler thought of Uhland's chaplet, 'Es pflückte blümlein männigfalt,' and taking out his note-book he wrote down—

'Old people's petitions, St. G. 4 o'clock. Offering up flowers, old woman, blue petticoat, white stripe. Pointed Gothic doorway, light from l to r through red st. glass. Uhland.'

The next place into which he strolled was a deserted little court of exchange, silent and tenantless, though the great busy street rolled by only a few score yards away. There were statues in florid niches, windows behind, a wonder of carved stonework, of pillars, of polished stems and brackets. It was a silent little nook, with a deep sky shining overhead, and the great black shadows striking and marking out the lovely ornaments which patient hands had carved and traced upon the stone. It was all very sympathetic and resting to his mind. It was like the conversation of a friend, who sometimes listens, sometimes discourses, saying all sorts of pleasant things; suggesting, turning your own dull and wearied thoughts into new ideas, brightening as you brighten, interesting you, leading you away from the worn-out old dangerous paths where you were stumbling and struggling, and up and down which you had been wandering as if bewitched.

Dick went back to the table-d'hôte at five o'clock, and desired the waiter to keep a vacant seat beside him. Before the soupe had been handed round, another young man not unlike Dick in manner, but taller and better looking, came strolling in, and with a nod and a smile, and a shake of the hand, sat down beside him.

'Where have you been?' said Dick.

'Looking for you,' said the other. 'Brittany—that sort of thing. Have you got on with your picture?'

'Yes,' Butler answered, 'finished it, and begun another. You know I'm on my way home. Better come, too, Beamish, and help me to look after all my aunt's boxes.'

'Which aunt's boxes?' said Beamish, eagerly.

'Not Mrs. Butler's,' Dick answered, smiling. 'But Catherine is flourishing, at least she was looking very pretty when I came away, and will, I have no doubt, be very glad to see me again.'

And then, when dinner was over, and the odd-looking British couples had retired to their rooms, the two young men lighted their cigars, and went out, and strolled out across the Place, and sat upon the log, until quite late at night, talking and smoking together in the quiet and darkness.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO CATHERINES.

Half my life is full of sorrow,
Half of joy still fresh and new,
One of these lives is a fancy;
But the other one is true.

A. A. PROCTER.

THERE are some things dull and shabby and uninteresting to one person, which to another are all shining with a mysterious light and glamour of their own. A dingy London hall, with some hats on pegs, a broad staircase with a faded blue and yellow Turkey carpet, occasionally a gloomy echoing of distant plates, and unseen pots and pans in the kitchens below; a drawing-room up above, the piano which gives out the usual tunes over and over again, like a musical snuff-box; the sofa, the table, the side-table, the paper-cutter, the 'Edinburgh,' and the 'Cornhill,' and the 'Saturday Review;' the usual mamma with her lace-cap, sitting on the sofa, the other lady at the writing-table, the young man just going away standing by the fireplace, the two young ladies sitting in the window with waves of crinoline and their heads

dressed. The people outside the window passing, repassing, and driving through Eaton Square, the distant unnoticed drone of an organ, the steeple of St. Peter's Church. This one spot, so dull, so strange to Madame de Tracy after her own pleasant green pastures, so like a thousand others to a thousand other people, was so unlike to one poor little person I know of; its charm was so strange and so powerful, that she could scarcely trust herself to think of it at one time. In after years she turned from the remembrance with a constant pain and effort, until at last by degrees the charm travelled elsewhere, and the sunlight lit up other places.

My little person is only Miss George, a poor little twenty-year old governess, part worried, part puzzled, part sad, and part happy too, for mere youth and good spirits. You can see it all in her round face, which brightens, changes, smiles, and saddens many times a day. She catches glimpses of the paradise I have been describing as she runs up and down stairs in pursuit of naughty, refractory Augusta, or dilatory little Sarah, or careless Lydia, who has lost her lesson and her pinafore and her pocket-handkerchief, or of Algy, whose life hangs by a leather strap as he slides up and down the precipitous banisters, and suspends himself from the landing by various contrivances of his own. 'What a noise those children are making,' says the aunt, looking up from her letter to the mamma, in the drawing-room. The young

man shuts the door as the little person goes past flying after Algy; she captures him, and brings him back a sulky little prisoner to the schoolroom on the stairs, where she herself, under the grand-sounding title of 'governess,' is a prisoner too. In this Domestic Bastille, with its ground-glass windows, from which escape is impossible—for they look into the areas deep down below, and into mews where there are horses and coachmen constantly passing—all the ancient terrors and appliances are kept up. Solitary confinement, the Question by Torture (Pinnock, Mangnall, &c., are the names given by the executioners to the various instruments). The thumbscrew stands in one corner of the room, with a stool which turns round and round, according to the length of the performer's legs; a registry is kept of secret marks where the various crimes and offences are noted down. Heavy fines are supposed to be levied; utter silence and implicit obedience are requested. But all this is only in theory after all; the prisoners have conspired, mutinied, and carried everything before them since Miss George's dominion set in. She presides in her official chair by the table, with her work in her hand, looking very bright and pretty, and not in the least like a governess. All the things about her look like a schoolroom; the walls and the maps, and the drugget, and the crumpled chintz. There are a few brown-paper books in the cases, and there is a worn-out table-cover on the table, and a blotted ink-

stand. There are blots everywhere, indeed, inside the books, on the chairs, under the table, on the ceiling, where ingenious Algy, with a squirt, has been able to write his initials and those of Miss Cornelia Bouchon, a former governess; there are blots on the children's fingers and elbows, and on Sarah's nose, and all over Augusta's exercise; only Miss George seems free from the prevailing epidemic.

There she sits, poor little soul; round-faced, dark-eyed: laughing sometimes, and scolding at others, looking quite desperate very often; as her appealing glances are now cast at Algy, now at Augusta or Lydia, as the case may be. Little Sarah is always good and gives no trouble; but the other three are silly children and tiresome occasionally. The governess is very young and silly, too, for her age, and quite unfitted for her situation. To-day the children are especially lively and difficult to deal with. An aunt arriving in a cab, with a French maid with tall grey boxes; with chocolate in her bag; with frizz curls and French boots, and a funny-looking bonnet; welcomings, embracings, expeditions proposed; Dick with a bag slung across his shoulder; the spare room made ready, a dinner-party to-morrow, the play on Thursday, Augusta and Lydia to appear at breakfast in their afternoon dresses—(so, Streatton, their mother's maid, had decreed): all this is quite enough to excite such very excitable young people. Algy nearly dislocates

every joint in his body; Augusta reads her history in a loud drawling voice, without paying attention to the stops, and longs to be grown up like Catherine and Georgie. Lydia ponders on her aunt's attire, and composes rich toilettes in the air for herself, such as she should like to wear if she were married and a French countess like her aunt Matilda. Sarah nibbles her chocolate and learns her poetry distractedly; even Miss George finds it difficult to keep up her interest in the battle of Tewkesbury which happened so many years ago, when all sorts of exciting things are going on at that very instant, perhaps, just outside the schoolroom door. . . . .

There is a sound of rustling, of voices, of discussion. Presently the mother's voice is raised above the rest. 'Catherine, make haste; the horses are here,' she calls.

Miss George blushes up and says, with a little cough, —'Go on, my dear Gussie.'

'Kitty,' cries another voice, 'don't forget to leave the note for Dick.'

And Miss George gives another little gulp. It is very foolish; she does not know how foolish and how much she minds it, or I think she would try to struggle against the feeling. She, too, used to be called 'Kitty,' 'Cathy,' 'Catherine,' once upon a time when she was seventeen. But that was three years ago, and no one ever says anything but 'Miss George' now, except Algy, who sometimes cries out, 'Hullo, George, you have got

another new bonnet!' Even that is better than being a 'Miss' always, from one day's end to another, and from morning to night, poor little 'George' thinks.

All day long, it seems to her, outside the schoolroom door she hears voices calling—fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters,—

'Catherine, the horses are here! Catherine, we are all waiting for you! Catherine, some flowers have come for you!'

As I have said, the schoolroom was on the drawing-room stairs, and the children and the governess could hear all that passed. It did seem a little hard sometimes that all the happiness and love, and all the fun and delight of life, and the hope and the care and the protection, should be for one Catherine—all the hard work and the struggles and loneliness and friendlessness for the other. Music, bright days, pleasant talk, sympathy pearls, turquoises, flowers, pretty things, beautiful dresses, for one—only slate pencils scratching, monotony, silence, rules, rulers, ink-blots, unsatisfied longings, ill-written exercises, copy-books, thumbed-out dictionaries, for the other. There are days when Miss George finds it very hard to listen with lively interest to Augusta's reluctant account of the battle of Tewkesbury. The sun shines, the clock ticks, birds hop up on the window-ledge, pens scratch on the paper, people come and talk outside

the door, everything happens to distract. Thoughts come buzzing and fancies bewilder.

'That is Mr. Beamish's voice,' Lydia would say, pricking up her ears. 'How often he comes!'

'No; it is cousin Dick,' said Augusta; 'he is going to ride out with them. Oh, how I wish they would take me, too!'

'Go on, my dear, with your reading,' says the governess, sternly.

'"She advanced through the counties of Devon, Somerset, and Gloucester, increasing her army on each day's march,"' says the little lectress, in a loud disgusted voice; '"each day's . . . but was at last overtaken by the rapid—the rapid and expeditious Edward——"'

'It *is* Mr. Beamish, Miss George,' said Lydia, complacently.

And then Mrs. Butler was heard through the keyhole, saying,—'We must dine at six o'clock, and mind you bring Richard, Mr. Beamish. Tell him his aunt, Madame de Tracy, desires him to come.'

'Go on, my dear,' says Miss George.

'"On the banks of the Severn,"' Augusta continues. And there the armies apparently come to a dead stop, for some one is heard to say something about 'the children too.'

'Certainly not,' replies the mother's voice, and so Gussie begins again in crestfallen tones:—

'"The Lancastrians were here totally defeated. The Earl of Devonshire and Lord Wenloc were killed on the field. The Duke of Somerset and about twenty other persons of distinction having taken shelter in a church, were surrounded, dragged out, and immediately beheaded."'

'Miss George, have you ever seen an execution?' says Sarah.

'*I* should like to see one,' says Algy, in an off-hand way. 'I shall get papa to take me, or cousin Dick. I'm sure he will if I ask him.'

'You horrid children!' says Miss George; 'how can you talk about such dreadful things? Please, dear Algy, do your sum, and don't draw blocks and heads. Go on, Augusta.'

'"Queen Margaret and her son were taken prisoners,"' said Augusta, '"and brought to the king, who asked the prince after an insulting manner, how he dared to invade his dominions.

'"The young prince, more mindful of his high birth than of his present fortune, replied that he came thither to claim his just inheritance; the ungenerous Edward, insensible to pity, struck him on the face with his gauntlet,"'—'Oh!' says Sarah, reproachfully,—'"and the Dukes of Clarence and Glou——"' But here the door opened, and instead of heroic and unfortunate princes, of kings savage and remorseless, of wicked uncles

and fierce bearded barons, and heart-broken and desperate queens, a beautiful young lady came into the room in a riding-habit, smiling, with her gold hair in a net. This was poor Catherine's shadow, her namesake, the happy Catherine, who haunted and vexed and charmed her all at once, who stood in the open doorway with all the sunshine behind her, and who was saying it was her birthday, and the little prisoners were to be set free.

'You will be able to go and see your sisters, Miss George,' Miss Butler says, smiling, 'for mamma is going to take the children out to lunch and for all the afternoon.'

'And where are you going to? Tell me, tell me, Kitty, please tell me,' says Augusta, flinging her arms round her.

'I am going to ride in the park with papa and Georgie and Mr. Beamish,' said Catherine; 'and this afternoon aunt Matilda wants us to go to Sydenham with her.'

'What fun you do have, to be sure!' said Augusta, with a long groan.

And then one of the voices as usual cries, 'Catherine, Catherine,' from below, and smiling once more, and nodding to them, the girl runs downstairs into the hall, where her father and the others are waiting, impatient to ride away into the bright summer parks.

The children went off much excited half-an-hour later,

Augusta chattering, Lydia bustling and consequential, and carrying a bag; Algy indulging in various hops, jerks, and other gymnastic signs of content; Sarah saying little, but looking all round eyes and happiness. Lunch with their cousins—shopping with mamma—the Zoological Gardens—buns for the bears—nuts for the monkeys—there seemed to be no end of delights in store for them as they tripped downstairs all ribbon-ends and expectation.

'Good-by, Miss George,' cried Lydia.

'Good-by, horrid schoolroom,' said Augusta.

'I do so like going out with mamma! wish I always did,' said little Sarah.

The children were not unkind, but they would have naturally preferred feeding monkeys to doing long-division sums with an angel from heaven, and poor Catherine, who was only a mortal after all, wrinkled up her eyebrows, and sighed. But her momentary ill-humour was gone in an instant. From her place on the landing, she heard the start,—the brief squabble with which children invariably set off,—the bland maternal interference. . . .

The carriage wheels rolled away, the door closed, and Catherine found herself all alone in a great empty house, with an afternoon of delightful liberty before her. It was all sunny and silent. The pots and pans down below were at rest for once, and hanging quietly upon their

pegs. The bedroom doors were open, the study was empty: there was no one in the drawing-room when she looked in, only the sun beating upon the blinds and pouring in through the conservatory window.

Catherine brought away a 'Tennyson' and a 'Saturday Review,' and came back into the schoolroom again, and sat down upon the little shabby sofa. She was not long in making up her mind as to what she should do with her precious hours of liberty. Her two little sisters filled every spare thought and moment in Catherine's busy life, and her poor little heart yearned towards the grim house in Kensington Square, with the five narrow windows, and the prim-looking wire blinds, behind which Rosy and Totty's curly heads were bobbing at work and at play, as the case might be.

As Catherine waited, resting in the schoolroom for a few minutes' she thought, with one more envious sigh, how she wished that she, too, had a large open carriage to drive off in. She longed—it was silly enough—to be the happy, fortunate Catherine, instead of the hard-working, neglected one. She thought how tired she was, and of the long hot Kensington Road; she thought of the other Catherine riding away through the park, in her waving grey habit, under the bright green trees, with that kind red-bearded Mr. Beamish curvetting beside her. It is only an every-day story—one little pig goes to market, another stays at home. One eats bread-and-

butter, another has none, and cries squeak, squeak, squeak. The clock struck one meanwhile. It was no use going off to her sisters until after their dinner; luncheon was not ready yet, and Catherine threw herself down at full length upon the sofa, and opened the paper she had brought off the drawing-room table. In at the window some sweet sultry summer air came blowing through a smutty lilac-tree. There was a clinking of pails and heavy footsteps. She read the review of a novel, of a new book of poetry, and then she turned to an essay. It was something about women and marrying, about feebleness, and inaptitude, and missing their vocation; about the just dislike of the world for the persons who could not conduce to its amusement or comfort. Catherine pushed it away impatiently: she did not want to read in black and white what she knew so well already; what she had to read always in the black and white of day and of night; what with unconscious philosophy she tried so hard to ignore.

A poor little thing, just beginning life with all the worlds and dreams of early youth in her heart, chafing, and piteously holding out her soft little hands against the stern laws of existence. No wonder she turned from the hard sentences. Anybody seeing the childish face, the gentle little movements, the pretty little hands which had just flung the paper away, would have been sorry for her. Catherine did not look even her twenty years; for

she was backward and scarcely full-grown. She looked too young and too childish, one might have thought, to be sent out by fate and respectable references into the world. One might have thought that she should have had older and wiser heads to think for her, kind hands to pull her out of difficulties, kind hearts to cherish her. She should have been alternately scolded and taken for treats, like the children; sent to bed early, set lessons to learn—other than those hard ones which are taught with stripes, and learnt only with painful effort. Thus, at least, it would have seemed to us small moralisers looking on from our fancy-ware repositories; where right and wrong, and oughts, and should-have-beens, are taken down from the shelf and measured out so liberally to supply the demand. . . . . Half-a-yard of favour for this person—three-quarters of trimming for that one—slashings let into one surtout of which we do not happen to fancy the colour—or instead of slashings loopholes, perhaps, neatly inserted into another; blue ribbons, gold cords and tassels, and rope-ends—there is no end to our stock and the things we dispense as we will upon our imaginary men and women: we give them out complacently and without hesitation, and we would fain bestow the same measure in like manner upon the living people we see all about us. But it is in vain we would measure out, dispense, approve, revoke. The fates roll on silent, immutable, carrying us and our various opinions along

with them, and the oughts and shoulds, the praises and blamings, and the progress of events.

There was a great deal of talking and discussion about little Catherine at one time—of course the family should have provided for the three girls; her stepmother's relations ought to have adopted Catherine, since she had no relations of her own; Mrs. Buckington was well-off; Lady Farebrother had more money than she knew what to do with; but it all ended in the little step-sisters being put to school, and in Catherine obtaining an excellent situation through an advertisement in 'The Times.' She got sixty pounds a year, and as she owned the interest of a thousand pounds besides, she was rich for a governess. But then she helped to pay for her sisters' schooling. She could not bear them to go to the cheap and retired establishment Lady Farebrother had suggested. The aunts did not insist when Catherine offered to pay the difference. People said it was a shame, but only what might have been expected of such worldly, pushing, disagreeable women as Mrs. Buckington and her sister, and so the matter ended. And so little Catherine at nineteen set to work for herself. She came—a blushing, eager little thing—to a certain house in Eaton Square, to earn her own living, to help those who were most dear to her, to teach Mrs. Butler's children a great many things she had never learnt herself. What a strange new world it was! of stir, of hard work, of thoughts and feelings un-

dreamt of in the quiet old days, before she left her home; running in the garden, playing with her little sister in the old wainscoted hall—only yesterday, so it appeared—adoring her stepmother, being naughty sometimes, being loved and happy always—this was all her experience; so small, so even, so quiet, that it seemed as though it might have lasted for years to come—instead of which now already all was over, and the tranquil memories were haunting poor little Catherine as sadly as though they were of sorrow, of passion, of stirring events.

She had stayed in Eaton Place for a year and more, depending for subsistence on her own exertions, for sympathy on a dream or two, for love and home and family on two little school-girls, whose pencil-notes she read over and over again on the many long days when she could not fly off to Mrs. Martingale's school in Kensington Square to see two little ugly girls, who would rush into the room and spring into her arms, with as many jumps of delight as Algy himself. Catherine used to tell them everything, and depended upon them for advice and assistance in all her difficulties. She had a way of clinging to every support and outstretched hand which came in her road. She had lived too long with her stepmother not to have learnt from her to trust and believe in every one who made any advance, or who seemed in the least inclined to be kind and helpful. If she had to pay for this credulity, it is hard to say what price would

be too great to give for it, it is worth in itself so much. Time after time, when any one spoke by chance a few good-natured words, and seemed to ask with some small interest how she was, how her sisters were, how she liked her situation, and so forth, her foolish little heart would leap with gratitude. 'Here is a friend indeed,' she would think to herself: 'I see it in her face, in his manner. Oh, how fortunate I am—how good people are!' And then the good-natured person would go away and forget all about the little governess, unconscious of the bitter pang of longing disappointment he or she had inflicted.

Meanwhile time went on: Cathèrine had worked very hard for many weeks, kept her temper, made the best of troublesome times, and struggled bravely in her small little feeble way; and she began to feel a little tired as people do sometimes, a little lonely and injured; she was not quite so simple, cheery, unconscious, as she had been when she first came, and the way in which people change and fail under vexation and worry has always seemed to me the saddest part of pain. The Butlers were very kind to her, but she lived by herself in the big busy house, and if she dreamed and longed for companionship and sympathy that might not be hers, one cannot blame her very harshly. Catherine thought that it was because she was a governess that such things were denied to her; she did not know then that to no one—neither to governesses

nor pupils nor parents—is that full and entire sympathy given, for which so many people—women especially—go seeking all their lives long.

For all this discouraging doctrine, a happy golden hour came to the little weary Catherine in her schoolroom this afternoon.

The sympathetic friend who could rouse the downcast heart and understand its need, the mighty enchanter whose incantations could bewitch the wearied little spirit from every-day life and bondage, and set it free for a time, was at hand. Catherine opened the book she had brought, and immediately the spell began to work. She did not see herself or her troubles or the shabby schoolroom walls any more, but suddenly there appeared King Arthur sitting high in hall, holding his court at Caerleon upon Usk. It was Prince Geraint who issued from a world of wood, and climbing upon a fair and even ridge, a moment showed himself against the sky. It was the little town gleaming in the long valley, and the white fortress and the castle in decay; and presently in the dreary courtyard it was some one singing as the sweet voice of a bird—'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel; our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.' Catherine read on, and Enid rode away all dressed in faded silk, and then Catherine went following, too, through many a woodland pass, by swamps and pools and wilds, through dreamy castle halls, and out into the country once more,

where phantom figures came and fell upon Geraint. False Doorm, and Edryn, wild Limours on his black horse, like the thunder-cloud whose skirts are loosened by the rising storm. . . . The shadowy arm struck without sound, clashing in silence. Great fresh winds from a distance were blowing about the room; the measured musical tramp of the rhythm was ringing in her ears; there was a sort of odd dazzle of sunlight, of martial strains very distant; the wheel of fortune was making a pumping noise in the court of the castle outside; and in the midst of it all the door opened, and some one—it might have been Geraint—walked in. For a moment Catherine looked up, dreaming still. It only took an instant for her to be metamorphosed into a governess once more.

'They are all gone out, Mr. Butler,' she said. 'Mr. and Miss Butler are riding to Caerleon, but they will be back to lunch.'

Catherine, who had quite recovered her every-day composure, wondered why young Mr. Butler smiled as he glanced at the little green volume in her hand. He was not so good-looking a man as Prince Geraint, he was not so broad or so big; he had fair curly hair, a straight nose, sleepy grey eyes, and a smart little moustache. He was dressed like a young man of fashion, with a flower in his coat.

'I am afraid I can't wait till they come in,' Richard

said. 'Perhaps you would let them know that it is to-morrow, not Thursday, I want them to drink tea at my place, and the children too. Please tell them I shall be excessively disappointed if anybody fails me. Good-morning, Miss James,' said Richard, affably. 'I see you are reading my book of Idylls.'

Butler ran downstairs, thinking as he went, 'Why do people ever choose ugly governesses? My aunt's Miss James is a little dear. Riding to Caerleon. She didn't know what she was saying. I should like to see my uncle Hervey accoutred as a knight of Arthur's round table. Poor old Hervey!'

As for 'Miss James,' as Richard called her, she looked into the beginning of the book, and saw R. X. B., in three whirligig letters, all curling up into one corner of the page. She blushed up now all by herself. 'I wish people would not speak to one in that affable, joking voice,' she thought; and she did not read any more, but went and put the book back on the drawing-room table, where it had been lying for weeks past.

At luncheon she duly gave her message. Only Mr. Butler and his two daughters, hungry, blown about, cheerfully excited by their morning's expedition, were present.

Mr. Butler was the usual middle-aged Englishman, with very square-toed boots and grizzly whiskers. He was fond of active pursuits. He talked gossip and

statistics. He naturally looked to his older brother Charles, who had never married, to assist him with his large family. Daughters grown up, and growing daily, tempestuous schoolboys at Eton, a midshipman, two wild young fellows in India, another very promising stupid son at college, who had gone up for his little-go with great *éclat*, Mr. Butler would tell you. There was no end to the young Butlers. But, unfortunately, Charles Butler greatly preferred Dick to any of his brother's sons. The boy was like his mother, and a look in his eyes had pleaded for him often and often when Dick himself wondered at his uncle's forbearance. Now the cousins only resembled their father, who greatly bored Charles Butler with his long stories and his animal spirits.

'We must go without mamma, if it is to be to-morrow,' said Catherine Butler.

'We could not possibly go without a chaperone,' said Georgina, who was great on etiquette. She was not so pretty as Catherine, and much more self-conscious.

'Capital cold beef this is,' said Mr. Butler. 'Can't Matilda play chaperone for the occasion? By-the-by, Catherine, I am not sorry to hear a good report of your friend Mr. Beamish. I can't afford any imprudent sons-in-law. Remember that, young ladies.'

'Should you like Dick, papa?' said Georgie, with a laugh.

'Humph! that depends,' said her father, with his

mouth full of cold beef. 'I should have thought my brother Charles must be pretty well tired out by this time, but I believe that if he were to drop to-morrow, Dick would come in for Muttondale and Lambswold. Capital land it is, too. I don't believe my poor boys have a chance,—not one of them. Down Sandy, down.' Sandy was Catherine's little Scotch terrier, who also was fond of cold beef.

'Dick is such a dear fellow,' said Catherine Butler, looking very sweet and cousinly, and peeping round the dish-covers at her father. 'Of course, I love my brothers best, papa; but I *can* understand uncle Charles being very fond of Richard.'

'Oh, Richard is a capital good fellow,' said Mr. Butler (not quite so enthusiastically as when he spoke of the beef a minute before). 'Let him get hold of anything he likes, and keep it if he can. I for one don't grudge him his good fortune. Only you women make too much of him, and have very nearly spoilt him among you. Painting and music is all very well in its way, but mark my words, it may be pushed too far.' And with this solemn warning the master of the house filled himself a glass of sherry, and left the room.

Miss George, as she tied on her bonnet-strings after luncheon, was somewhat haunted by Dick's sleepy face. The visions of Geraint, and Launcelot, and Enid, and King Arthur's solemn shade, still seemed hovering about

her as she went along the dusty road to Kensington, where two little figures were beckoning from behind the iron rail of their school-house yard. Presently the children's arms were tightly clutched round Catherine's neck, as the three went and sat down all in a heap on Mrs. Martingale's grey school-house sofa, and they chattered and chirped and chirupped for an hour together, like little birds in a nest.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE RIVER.

With store of vermeil roses,
To deck their bridegrooms' posies,
Against the bridal day, which was not long,
Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song.
PROTHALAMION.

CATHERINE had forgotten her morning visions; they had turned into very matter-of-fact speculations about Totty's new hat and Rosa's Sunday frock, as she came home through the park late in the afternoon. A long procession of beautiful ladies was slowly passing, gorgeous young men were walking up and down and along the Row, looking at the carriages and parasols, and recognising their acquaintances. The trees and the grass were still green and in festive dress, the close of this beautiful day was all sweet and balmy and full of delight for those who could linger out in the long daylight. The Serpentine gleamed through the old elm-trees and in the slant sun-rays. Catherine was delighted with the sweet fresh air and childishly amused by the crowd, but she thought she had better get out of it. As she was turning

out of the broad pathway by one of the small iron gates of the park, she came face to face with Dick Butler walking with a couple of friends. He took off his hat as he passed, and Miss George again bowed with the air of a meek little princess.

'Who is that?' said Beamish. 'I don't know her.'

Mr. Beamish was destined to improve his acquaintance, for there came a little note from Mrs. Butler to Dick early next morning:—

'My dear Richard,—I am very sorry to find that I cannot possibly join your party this afternoon, but the girls and your aunt will be delighted to come. The children declare you would be horribly disappointed if they did not make their appearance. I am afraid of their being troublesome. May I send Miss George to keep them in order? They are beyond their sisters' control I fear. Ever affectionately yours,

'S. Butler.

'P.S.—Will not you and Mr. Beamish be amiable and look in upon us this evening? you will find some friends.'

Dick's studio was in Queen's Walk. He lived in one of those old brown houses facing the river. He could see the barges go by, and the boats and the steamers sliding between the trees which were planted along the water-

side. An echo of the roar of London seemed passing by outside the ancient gates of his garden; within everything was still and silent, and haunted by the past. An old daïs of Queen Anne's time still hung over his doorway, and he was very proud of his wainscoted hall and drawing-room, and of the oaken stairs which led up to his studio. His friend lived with him there. Mr. Beamish was in the Foreign Office, and had good expectations. As he was an only son and had been very rigidly brought up, he naturally inclined to Dick, and to his Bohemian life, and the two young men got on very well together. The house had been a convent-school before they came to it, and gentle black-veiled nuns had slid from room to room, rosy ragged children had played about the passages and the oaken hall, and had clattered their mugs, and crumbled their bread-and-butter, in the great bow-windowed dining-room at the back. The young men had seen the place by chance one day, were struck by its quaintness and capabilities, and they agreed to take it together and to live there. The children and the nuns went away through the iron gates. Butler put workmen in, to repair, and polish, and make ready, and then he came and established himself, with his paint-pots and canvases.

The studio was a great long room, with a cross-light that could be changed and altered at will; for which purpose heavy curtains and shutters had been put up.

There was matting on the floor, and some comfortable queer-shaped chairs were standing round the fireplace. The walls were panelled to about four feet from the ground, and from hooks and nails and brackets hung a hundred trophies of Butler's fancies and experiences. Pictures begun and never finished, plaster casts, boxing-gloves, foils, Turkish pipes and scimitars, brown jugs of graceful slender form, out of Egyptian tombs. Bits of blue china, and then odd garments hanging from hooks, Venetian brocades of gold and silver, woven with silk, and pale and strange-coloured stuffs and gauzes, sea-green, salmon-colour, fainting blue, and saffron and angry orange-browns. English words cannot describe the queer, fanciful colours.

There was a comfortable sofa with cushions, and a great soft carpet spread at one end of the room, upon which the tea-table stood, all ready laid with cakes and flowers. Beamish had gone out that morning and bought a waggon-load of flowers, for the studio and the balcony. There was a piano in a dark corner of the room, where the curtains cast a gloom, but the windows on the balcony were set wide open, and the river rolled by grey and silvery, and with a rush, carrying its swift steamers and boats and burdens. The distant banks gleamed through the full-leaved branches, a quiet figure stood here and there under the trees, watching the flow of the stream. It was a strange, quaint piece of mediæval life set into

the heart of to-day. The young men should have worn powder and periwigs, or a still more ancient garb. In the church near at hand a martyr lies buried, and it is the old bygone world that everything tells of—as the river flows past the ancient houses. Presently the clock from the steeple of old St. Mary's Church clanged out, and at that very instant there was a loud ring at the bell. Beamish started up. Dick looked over the balcony. It was only the punctual children, who had insisted upon starting much too soon, and who had been walking up and down the street, waiting until it should be time for them to make their appearance.

'Do you know we very nearly didn't come at all, Dick?' they instantly began telling him from down below in the hall. 'Mamma said she couldn't come, and Miss George didn't want to, did you, Miss George? and they said we should be a bother; and we were afraid we were late, but we weren't.' All this was chiefly in Algy's falsetto. Lydia joined in—'Wouldn't you have been disappointed if we had not come, Dick? and why have you hung up all these little things?'

'They are kitchen plates and old clothes,' says Algy, splitting with laughter; 'and some foils—oh, jolly!'

'Algy,' said Miss George, very determined and severe, because she was so shy—'remember that I am going to take you away if you are troublesome.'

'He won't be troublesome, Miss George. He never

' said Dick, good-humouredly. 'Look here; won't you down?' and he pushed forward the enormous tapestried air in which he had been lounging. Catherine sat own. She looked a very small little person in her white own, lost in the great arm-chair. She glanced round riously, with her bright eyes, and forgot her rôle of overness for a minute.

'How delightful the river is—what a dear old place!' he said in her plaintive childish voice. 'What nice china!'—she happened to have a fancy for [illegible] and cracked teapots, and had kept the key of her [illegible] china closet. 'This is Dutch, isn't it?' she asked. And then she blushed up shyly, and felt very forward all of a sudden.

'Here is a nice old bit,' said Beamish, coming up to Dick's assistance, with a hideous [illegible] a bargain. 'Butler and I are rival collectors, [illegible]

'Are you?' said Catherine, blushing again.

'Yes,' said Beamish. And then there was a pause in the conversation, and they heard the river [illegible], and both grew shyer and shyer.

Meanwhile, Dick was going about with the [illegible] who had fortunately preserved their composure, and [illegible] seemed all over the place in a minute.

'And now show us something else, [illegible] George!' he shouted, 'I mean to be an artist [illegible] when I'm a man.'

'What a brilliant career Algy is chalking out for himself, isn't he, Beamish?' said poor Dick.

'He might do worse,' Beamish answered kindly. 'You must let Miss George see your picture. He has painted a capital picture this time, Miss George.'

Dick had modestly turned it with its face to the wall. 'They don't want to see my picture,' said Dick; and he went on pulling one thing out after another, to the delight of the three little girls who stood all in a row, absorbed in his wonderful possessions. Algy was inspecting a lay figure, and quite silent and entranced by the charming creature. Poor little Miss George, meanwhile, sat in her big chair, growing shyer and shyer every minute: she was longing for the others to appear. Perhaps Beamish also was looking out for them.

They came at last, with a roll of wheels, a rustle, some gentle laughter and confusion on the stairs; and the two young fellows rushed down to receive their guests. Georgie was in blue, and had her affected manner on. Catherine Butler was all in a light grey cloud from head to foot, and looked like a beautiful apparition as she came under the curtain of the door, following her aunt. Madame de Tracy was bustling in, without any poetic or romantic second thoughts, exclaiming at everything she saw—delighted with the convenience of the house. She was unlike Mrs. Butler in the sincere and unaffected interest she took in all sorts of other people's schemes,

arrangements, money matters, and love-makings, lodgings, and various concerns.

'But how well-off you are here, Dick! I congratulate you! you must feel quite cramped at Tracy after this! Catherine! Look at that river and the flowers. . . . Is it not charming?—you are quite magnificent; my dear Dick, you are receiving us like a prince!'

'Beamish got the flowers,' said Richard, smiling; 'I only stood the cakes. Now, then, Catherine, you must make tea, please.'

They all went and sat round the tea-table in a group. Madame de Tracy and Georgina were upon the sofa. The children were squatting on the floor, while Miss George stood handing them their cakes and their tea, for Dick's chairs were big and comfortable, but not very numerous. Catherine Butler, with deft, gentle fingers, dipped the china into the basin, poured water from the kettle with its little flame, measured, with silver tongs, and queer old silver spoons, the cream and sugar into the fragrant cups. She might have been the priestess of the flower-decked altar, offering up steaming sacrifices to Fortune. Beamish secretly pledged her in the cup she handed him with her two hands, and one of her bright sudden smiles. A little person in white, who was standing against some tapestry in the background, cutting bread and jam for the hungry children, caught sight of the two, and thrilled with a feminine kindness, and then smiled, hanging her head

over the brown loaf. Dick, who was deeply interested in the issue of the meeting that afternoon, was sitting on the back of the sofa, and by chance he saw one Catherine's face reflected in the other's. He was touched by the governess's gentle sympathy, and noticed, for the first time, that she had been somewhat neglected.

'You want a table, Miss George,' said Dick, placing one before her, 'and somewhere to sit down. . . . And you have no tea yourself. You have been so busy attending to everybody else. Catherine, we want some tea here. . . . Beamish, why don't you go and play the piano, and let us feast with music like the Arabian Nights? . . .'

'How pretty the flowers are growing!' cried little Sarah, pointing. 'Oh, do look, Miss George dear! . . .'

'It's the sun shining through the leaves,' said Madame de Tracy, in a matter-of-fact tone.

'The water shines too,' said Augusta. 'I wish there was a river in Eaton Square; don't you, Catherine?'

'I envy you your drawing-room, Dick,' said Madame de Tracy, conclusively. 'Mr. Beamish, pray give us an air.'

Beamish now got up and went to the piano. 'If I play, you must show them your picture,' he said, striking a number of chords very quickly, and then he sat down and began to play parts of that wonderful Kreutzer sonata, which few people can listen to unmoved. The piano was near where Catherine Butler had been making

the tea, and she turned her head and listened, sitting quite still with her hands in her lap. I think Beamish was only playing to her, although all the others were listening round about. I know he only looked up at her every now and then as he played. Little Catherine George had sunk down on a low chair by the children, and had fallen into one of her dreams again. . . . She understood, though no one had ever told her, all that was passing before her. She listened to the music: it seemed warning, beseeching, prophesying, by turns. There is one magnificent song without words in the adagio, in which it seems as if one person alone is uttering and telling a story, passionate, pathetic, unutterably touching. Catherine thought it was Beamish telling his own story in those beautiful, passionate notes to Catherine, as she sat there in her great cloud dress, with her golden hair shining in the sunset. Was she listening? Did she understand him? Ah, yes! Ah, yes, she must! Did everybody listen to a story like this once in their lives? Catherine George wondered. People said so. But, ah! was it true? It was true for such as Catherine Butler, perhaps—for beautiful young women, loved, and happy, and cherished; but was it true for a lonely and forlorn little creature, without friends, without beauty (Catherine had only seen herself in her glass darkly as yet), with no wealth of her own to buy the priceless treasure of love and sympathy? The sun was shining outside; the steamers and boats

were still sailing by; Catherine Butler's future was being decided. Little Catherine sat in a trance; her dark eyes were glowing. Beamish suddenly changed the measure, and crashed about on the piano, until by degrees it was Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' which went swinging through the room in great vibrations. Then Catherine George seemed to see the mediæval street, the old German town, the figures passing, the bridegroom tramping ahead, and the young men marching along in procession. She could almost see the crisp brocades and the strange-cut dresses, and hear the whispering of the maidens following with the crowned bride; while from the gables of the queer old town—(she even gave it a name, and vaguely called it Augsburg or Nuremburg to herself)—people's heads were pushing and staring at the gay procession. It was one of those strange phantasmagorias we all know at times, so vivid for the moment that we cannot but believe we have seen it once, or are destined to witness it at some future time in reality.

Beamish left off playing suddenly, and bent over the instrument, and began talking to Catherine Butler in low, eager tones. Madame de Tracy and Georgie, who had had enough music, were standing at the window by this time, watching the scene outside. The children, too, had jumped up, and ran out one by one upon the balcony. Not for the first time, and, alas! not for the last, poor child, a weary, strange, lost feeling came over Catherine

George, as she sat on an overturned chest, in the great, strange room. It came to her from her very sympathy for the other two, and gladness in their content. It was a sharp, sudden thorn of aloneness and utter forlornness, which stung her so keenly in her excited and eager state that two great tears came and stood in her eyes; but they were youthful tears, fresh and salt, of clear crystal, unsoiled, undimmed as yet by the stains of life.

Dick, who was himself interested for his friend, and excited beyond his custom, and who had begun to feel a sort of interest in the sensitive little guest, thought she was feeling neglected. He had noticed her from across the room, and he now came up to her, saying, very gently and kindly, 'Would you care to see my picture, Miss George? my aunt and my cousin say they want to see it. It's little enough to look at.'

As he said, it was no very ambitious effort. An interior. A fishwife sitting watching for her husband's return, with her baby asleep on her knee. One has seen a score of such compositions. This one was charmingly painted, with feeling and expression. The colours were warm and transparent; the woman's face was very touching, bright and sad at once; her brown eyes looked out of the picture. There was life in them, somehow, although the artist had, according to the fashion of his school, set her head against a window, and painted hard black shadows and deeply marked lines with ruthless fidelity.

The kitchen was evidently painted from a real interior. The great carved cupboard, with the two wooden birds pecketting each other's beaks, and the gleaming steel hinges, with two remarkable rays of light issuing from them; the great chimney, with the fire blazing; (the shovel was an elaborate triumph of art;) the half-open window, looking out across fields to the sea; the distaff, the odd shuttles for making string, hanging from the ceiling; the great brass pan upon the ground, with the startling reflections. It was all more than true to nature, and the kitchen—somewhat modified, and less carefully polished—might be seen in any of the cottages and farmsteads round about the Château de Tracy for miles.

'My dear Dick, you have made an immense start,' said his aunt. 'It's admirable. It's by far the best thing you have done yet. Who is it so like? Catherine, only look at the brass pan and the cupboard. Madame Binaud has got just such a one in her kitchen.'

Dick shrugged his shoulders, but he was pleased at the praise. 'I have another thing here,' he said, smiling, 'only it isn't finished.' And he rolled out another canvas on an easel.

'It's quite charming! What's the subject?' said Madame de Tracy, looking through her eyeglass.

'Oh, I don't know. Anything you like. A cart—Normandy peasants going for a drive—coming back from market,' said Dick, blushing, and looking a little con-

scious. . . . 'I have been obliged to paint out the girl's head, Georgie. I wish you'd sit to me.' And looking up as he spoke—not at Georgie—he met the glance of two soft dark eyes which were not Georgie's. 'I wish YOU would sit to me, Miss George,' cried Dick, suddenly inspired. 'You would make a first-rate fishwife; wouldn't she, Aunt Matilda?'

'I think Miss George would look very nice indeed in the costume,' Madame de Tracy good-humouredly said. 'She is a brunette, like all our girls.' And Madame de Tracy turned her eyeglass on Miss George, and nodded. She then glanced at Dick.

'I should be very glad to sit to Mr. Butler,' said Miss George in her gentle way, 'but I am afraid I should not have time. I am very much occupied, and the children mustn't be neglected,—and I hope they are not in trouble now,' she added, looking round. 'I'm afraid it is time for us to go.' The clock of the old church had struck six some time, and, as she said, it was time to go.

Madame de Tracy looked at her watch, and gave a little scream. 'Yes, indeed,' she said. 'My brother Charles and half-a-dozen other people dine in Eaton Square to-night. Are you coming?'

'Beamish and I are coming in to dessert,' said Dick; 'at least he seemed to wish it this morning.'

'We have to get home, we have to dress,' said Madame de Tracy pre-occupied. 'Georgie, where is my parasol?

Catherine, are you ready? Have you finished your talk?'

Beamish and Catherine had finished their talk by this time, or begun it rather, for it was a life-long talk they had entered into. The carriage had come back for the elders of the party. The children, who had eaten enormously, went off slightly subdued.

The two young men stood in the iron gateway, watching the carriage as it drove away, and the governess and little pupils slowly sauntering homewards along the riverside.

Beamish looked very tall and very odd as he stood leaning against the iron gate, round which some clematis was clinging.

Dick glanced at him, and then at the river, and then at his friend again. 'Well!' he said, at last, pulling a leaf off a twig.

'It is all right,' Beamish said, with the light in his face as he put out his hand to Dick; and then the two cordially shook hands, to the surprise of some little ragged children who were squatting in the road.

CHAPTER IV.

EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY.

But Merran sat behint thur backs,
Her thoughts on Andrew Bell.
She lea'es them gashin' at their cracks,
And slips out by hersel'.

Hallowe'en.

CATHERINE held little Sarah's hand tightly clasped in hers as they went home along the busy streets. She had not met with so much romance in her short hard life, this poor little Catherine, that she could witness it unmoved in others. She had read of such things in books before now, of Lord Orville exclaiming with irresistible fire, 'My sweet, my beloved, Miss Anville!' of Rochester's energetic love-making, of Mr. Knightley's expressive eyes, as he said, 'My dearest Emma, for dearest you will be to me, whatever may be the result of this morning's conversation.' And she had read of the sweet bunch of fragrant lilac which a young lover had sent to his lady, and now here was a sweet bunch of lilac for Catherine Butler; so the little governess called it to herself, and the sweetness and

scent seemed diffused all round, until they, the bystanders, were all perfumed and made fragrant too.

Catherine had heard Mr. Beamish saying,—'I shall come this evening and see you,' as he put Miss Butler into the carriage. The girl had not answered, but her face looked very sweet and conscious, as she bent over and held out her hand to him. Poor Dick was looking on too, and a little old refrain came into his head. 'En regrettant la Normandie,' it went. 'En regrettant . . . .' This sweet dream of love-making made the way short and pleasant, though the children lagged and stopped at every interesting sight along the road. The man pouring beer out of his can, the milkwoman setting down her pails, the cart full of oranges and blue paper, the grocer taking in faggots two by two out of a cart: all was grist that came to their little mills, and delayed the fatal return to evening tasks and bed. For the little governess the sweet summer twilight was all a-glow, and she was in a sort of enchanted world, where perfect happiness was waiting at unexpected corners; where people understood what was in one another's hearts; where there was a little trouble to begin with, but where at two or three and twenty (Miss Butler was little more), or even sooner, the fragrant bunch of lilacs flowered for most people, and then what mattered all the rest? If the flowers were blooming on the branches, a passing storm, or wind, or darkness, could not unmake the spring.

One privilege belonging to her position Miss George had not, perhaps, valued so highly as she might have done. It was that of coming down in white muslin with Augusta after dinner whenever she liked. Little sleepy Sarah, and the aggrieved Lydia, would be popped into white calico and disposed of between the sheets; but Miss George and Augusta were at liberty to enjoy the intoxicating scene if they felt so inclined.

Mr. Butler nodding off over the paper; Mrs. Butler at her davenport, writing civil notes, one after another, in her large even handwriting; Catherine and Georgina strumming on the pianoforte; the back-room quite dark, and the tea stagnating on a small table near the doorway: —this was when there was nobody there. When there was company the aspect of things was very different. Both the chandeliers would be lighted, the round sofa wheeled out into the middle of the room. Three ladies would be sitting upon it with their backs turned to one another; Georgina and a friend, in full evening dress, suppressing a yawn, would be looking over a book of photographs.

'Do you like this one of me?' Georgina would say, with a slight increase of animation. 'Oh, what a horrid thing!' the young lady would reply. 'If it was me, I should burn it—indeed I should. And is that your sister?—a Silvy I am sure.' 'Yes, my cousin Richard cannot bear it; he says she looks as if her neck was being

wrung.' In the meantime, Catherine Butler, kindly attentive and smiling, would be talking to old Lady Shiverington, and trying to listen to her account of her last influenza, while Mrs. Butler, with her usual tact, was devoting herself to the next grander Lady present. Madame de Tracy, after being very animated all dinner-time, would be sitting a little subdued with her fan before her eyes. Coffee would be handed round by the servants. After which the climax of the evening would be attained, the door would fly open, and the gentlemen come straggling up from dinner, while tea on silver trays was being served to the expectant guests.

Mr. Butler, with a laugh, disappears into the brilliantly lighted back room with a couple of congenial white neck-cloths, while Mr. Bartholomew, the great railway contractor, treads heavily across the room to his hostess and asks if these are some more of her young ladies? and how was it that they had not had the pleasure of their company at dinner? 'My daughter Augusta is only twelve, Mr. Bartholomew, and is not thinking of coming out,' Mrs. Butler would say; 'and that is Miss George, my children's governess. It amuses her to come down, poor girl. *Have* you had any tea?'

Miss George, far from being amused by all this brilliancy, generally kept carefully out of the way; but on this particular evening, after five-o'clock tea at the studio, she had been haunted by a vague curiosity and excitement,

and she felt as if she must come down—as if it would be horrible to sit all alone and silent in the schoolroom, out of reach, out of knowledge, out of sight, while below, in the more favoured drawing-room, the people were all alive with interest, and expectation, and happiness.

Just before dinner she had met Madame de Tracy on the stairs, fastening her bracelets and running down in a great hurry. Catherine looked up at her and smiled as she made way, and the elder lady, who was brimming over with excitement and discretion, and longing to talk to every one on the subject which absorbed her, said,—

'Ah, Miss George, I see you found out our secret this afternoon—not a word to the children. Mr. Beamish is coming to-night after dinner to speak to my brother. Hush! some one is on the stairs.'

Miss George was not the only person in the establishment who surmised that something was going on. Madame de Tracy's vehement undertones had roused the butler's curiosity; he had heard the master of the house confessing that he was not totally unprepared; while Mrs. Butler was late for dinner, an unprecedented event, and had been seen embracing her daughter with more than usual effusion in her room upstairs. Mrs. Butler was one of those motherly women entirely devoted to their husbands and children, and who do not care very much for anybody else in all the world, except so far as they are conducive to the happiness of their own family. She

worked, thought, bustled, wrote notes, arranged and contrived for her husband and children. Her davenport was a sort of handmill, at which she ground down paper, pens, monograms, stamps, regrets, delights, into notes, and turned them out by the dozen. Her standard was not a very high one in this world or in the next, but she acted industriously up to it such as it was; and although her maternal heart was stirred with sympathy, she was able to attend to her guests and make small talk as usual. I do not think that one of them, from her manner, could have guessed how she longed secretly to be rid of them all.

Catherine George, who was only the little governess and looker-on, felt her heart stirred too as she dressed in her little room upstairs to come down after dinner; unconsciously she took more than usual pains with herself; she peered into her looking-glass, and plumed and smoothed out her feathers like a bird by the side of a pool.

She thought her common gown shabby and crumpled, and she pulled out for the first time one of those which had been lying by ever since she had left her own home. This was a soft Indian muslin, prettily made up with lace and blue ribbons. Time had yellowed it a little, but it was none the worse for that, and if the colours of the blue ribbons had faded somewhat, they were all the softer and more harmonious. With her rough dark hair piled up in

a knot, she looked like a little Sir Joshua lady when she had tied the bead necklace that encircled her round little throat, and then she came down and waited for Augusta in the empty drawing-room. Catherine was one of those people who grow suddenly beautiful at times, as there are others who become amiable all at once, or who have flashes of wit, or good spirits; Catherine's odd sudden loveliness was like an inspiration, and I don't think she knew of it. The little thing was in a strange state of sympathy and excitement. She tried to think of other things, but her thoughts reverted again and again to the sunny studio, the river rushing by, the music, the kind young men, and the beautiful, happy Catherine, leaning back in the old carved chair, with her bright eyes shining as she listened to Beamish's long story. The sun had set since he had told it, and a starlight night was now reigning overhead. The drawing-room windows were open, letting in a glimmer of stars and a faint incense from Catherine Butler's flowers outside on the balcony. Little Miss George took up her place in a quiet corner, and glanced again and again from the dull drawing-room walls to the great dazzling vault without, until the stars were hidden from her by the hand of the butler who came in to pull down the blinds and light the extra candles, and to place the chairs against the wall. Whilst he was thus engaged in making the room comfortable, he remarked that 'the ladies would not be up for ten minutes or more, and if

Miss George and Miss Augusta would please to take a little ice there would be plenty of time?'

'Yes, certainly,' said Augusta; 'bring some directly, Freeman.' And she and Miss George shared their little feast with one spoon between them.

The ladies came up from dinner, and Augusta was summoned to talk to them, and little Miss George was left alone in her corner. She was quite happy although she had no one to speak to; she was absorbed in the romance of which she had conned the first chapters, and of which the heroine was before her in her white gauze dress, with the azalias in her hair.

And so one Catherine gazed wondering and speculating, while the other sat there patiently listening to the old ladies' complaining talk,—to stories of doctors, and ailments, and old age, and approaching death, coming so soon after the brilliant strains of youth, and music, and romance.

One Catherine's bright cheeks turned very pale; the other, who was only looking on, blushed up, when, almost immediately after the tea-tray, the door opened, and Dick and Mr. Beamish walked in without being announced. Mrs. Butler looked up and smiled and held out her hand. Mr. Butler came striding forward from the back room. Madame de Tracy put up her eyeglass; Catherine Butler looked down, but she could say 'yes' quite quietly to old Lady Shiverington, who asked in a loud whisper if that

was Mr. Beamish. 'The young men come to dinner, my dear, time after time,' said the old lady, nodding her ancient head, 'but they are all so much alike I don't know one from another.'

And so this was all that Catherine had come out of her schoolroom to see? Charles Butler had been looking on too from the other end of the room, with little blinking eyes instead of dark fawn-like orbs, and at this stage of the proceedings he moved out of the way, and came across and sank down, much to Miss George's alarm, in a vacant arm-chair beside her. There she sat in her muslin, fair, pretty, soft, with shy, quick, curious glances; and there sat the old fellow with his wrinkled face and thick eyebrows; she need not have been afraid, though he looked somewhat alarming. If Mr. Bartholomew, who was standing by, could have known what was passing in the minds of these two people, he might have been struck, had he been romantically inclined, by the duet they were unconsciously playing.

'Matilda has been in great force to-night,' thought Mr. Butler; 'but her confidences are overpowering, whispering mystery,—hiss, hiss, hiss,—how she does delight in a love affair! If it had been poor unlucky Dick now,—but I suppose no woman of sense would have a word to say to him, and he will make a terrible fool of himself sooner or later. Eh, eh, we have all made fools of ourselves. . . It is only about half a century since I first

saw his mother under the lime-trees. Poor dear! Poor dear!' and the old fellow began to beat a tune to a dirge with his foot as he thought of what was past. Meanwhile Miss George was playing her treble in the duet. 'What can it be like,' the little governess was thinking, 'to love, to be loved, actually to live the dreams and the stories? Oh, I cannot imagine it! Is it like listening to music? Is it like that day when we climbed the hill in the sunset, my mother and I, higher and higher, and it was all like heaven in the valley? Is there some secret sympathy which makes quite old and wrinkled people care when they see such things, or does one only cease to feel in time? How calm Catherine looks! she scarcely speaks to Mr. Beamish. I can see Madame de Tracy smiling and nodding her head to her across the room. Can people care really and truly and with all their hearts, and give no more sign? What should I do if I were Catherine? Ah, what am I thinking?'

Here Mr. Butler suddenly gave a grunt and said,—

'I am quite convinced the fault of all arm-chairs is that they are not made deep enough in the seat; my legs are quite cramped and stiff from that abominable contrivance in which I have been sitting. I cannot imagine how my brother can go to sleep in it night after night in the way he does.'

'Isn't Mr. Butler's arm-chair comfortable?' said

Catherine, smiling. 'The children and I have always looked at it with respect; we never should venture to sit in it, or not to think it deep enough in the seat.'

'I see Mr. Beamish is not too shy to occupy the chair of state,' said old Mr. Butler, glancing at Catherine from under his thick eyebrows, and unconsciously frightening her into silence.

Catherine was oppressed by circumstance and somewhat morbid by nature, as people are who have lively imaginations and are without the power of expansion. She had lived with dull people all her life, and had never learned to talk or to think. Her step-mother was a tender-hearted and sweet-natured sad woman, who was accustomed to only see the outside of things. Mrs. George had two dozen little sentences in her repertory, which she must have said over many thousand times in the course of her life, and which Catherine had been accustomed hitherto to repeat after her, and to think of as enough for all the exigencies and philosophy of life. But now everything was changing, and she was beginning to find thoughts for herself, and to want words to put them into; and with the thoughts and the words, alas! came the longing for some one to listen to her strange new discoveries, and to tell her what they meant. But it was not old Charles Butler to whom she could talk. She looked across the room.

Yes, Beamish was there installed; they were all wel-

coming him for the sake of their beloved princess. 'Ah, what am I thinking!' thought Catherine again. 'Would there be any one in the world to care if——?' She did not finish the sentence, but a vague impossibility, in the shape of a Geraint, with sleepy eyes and without a name, passed through her mind. As chance would have it, Dick Butler came sauntering up at this minute, and she started and blushed as usual, and her visions vanished. Catherine almost felt as if he must see them flying away.

It was not Dick, with his short-sighted eyes, who saw the little fancies flying away; but there were others present who were more experienced and more alive to what was passing. Madame de Tracy was a woman of lively imagination, who scarcely knew any of the people present, and had nobody to talk to; and so it happened that at the end of a quarter of an hour she began to think that her nephew had been conversing quite long enough with Miss George.

All the world might have heard what he was saying to her. Dick was only telling Miss George about Normandy, about the beautiful old ruins, the churches turned into barns, talking Murray and little else. For reasons best known to himself he liked telling of the places he had lately seen, although he said but little of the people he had known there. And Miss George was a good listener. She said not much, but her bright little face brightened as he went on with his stories. They were prosy enough,

some people might have thought. His uncle had joined in once and exclaimed, 'Spare us the description of the next church you visited, Richard;' but Catherine George liked every word and listened in delighted attention. Catherine listened; she had better far have sat up all alone in her schoolroom, poor child, with her candle-ends and fancies of what might have been.

Later in life, when people have outlived the passionate impatience of youth, when the mad wild longings are quieted, and the things their own, perhaps, and no longer valued, for which they would have given their lives once —long ago—when people are sober and matter-of-fact, when they have almost forgotten that strange impetuous self of former days, it is easy to blame and to pooh-pooh, to crush and brush away the bright beautiful bubbles which the children are making in their play. Madame de Tracy did not feel one moment's remorse, sentimental as she was, when she came across and interrupted little Catherine's happy half-hour, and Dick in his eloquent talk.

Dick was asking Catherine what she thought of the five-o'clock tea. 'We had music, uncle Charles, hadn't we, Miss George? Beamish played first fiddle, *Ah ti voglio ben assai*, a Neapolitan air, uncle Charles. Nobody ever sang it to *you*.' And Dick, who was excited and in high spirits, began humming and nodding his head in time. He suddenly stopped—old Charles made a warning sign. 'Miss

George was present and knows all about it; don't be afraid, she is discretion itself, and of course we are all thinking about the same thing. What is the use of pretending?'

'If Miss George is discretion itself, that quite alters the case,' said Mr. Butler.

Meanwhile Dick was going on,—'Look at uncle Hervey performing the *père noble*, and making Beamish look foolish. Dear old Beamish, I shouldn't let him marry Catherine if he was not the best fellow in the whole world.'

'My niece is fortunate to have secured such a paragon,' said Charles, showing his sympathy by a little extra dryness.

'Their faces are something alike, I think,' said Miss George, timidly; 'they seem very well suited.'

'Of course,' said Dick: '5,000*l.* a year in prospect—what can be more suitable? If they had no better reason for wanting to get married than because they were in love with one another, then you should hear the hue-and-cry their affectionate relatives can raise.'

'Quite right too,' said old Mr. Butler.

Catherine glanced from one to the other.

'You don't think it quite right, do you, Miss George?' said Dick, and then his aunt came up and carried him off.

'Young fellows like Dick often talk a great deal of nonsense,' said old Butler, kindly, as Catherine sat looking

after the two as they walked away arm-in-arm. 'Depend upon it, my nephew would no more wish to marry upon an incompetence than I should. Remember he is not the man to endure privation, except for his own amusement.'

He spoke so expressively, blinking his little grey eyes, that the girl looked up curiously, wondering whether he could mean anything. All the evening she had been sitting there in her white gown, feeling like a shade, a thing of no account among all this living people, a blank in the closely-written page, a dumb note in the music. A sort of longing had come over her to be alive, to make music too; and now to be warned even, to be acting a part ever so small in this midsummer night's dream, was enough to thrill her sad little childish heart with excitement. Could he be warning her? Then it came like a flash, and her heart began to beat faster and faster. There was something possible after all besides governessing and lesson-books in her dull life, something to beware of, to give interest, even the interest of danger to the monotonous road. To be scorned did not seem to her so unutterably sad as to be utterly passed by and ignored. Charles Butler never guessed the harm he had done.

It was not the Miss George who had dressed herself in her yellowed muslin who went upstairs to bed that night. It was another Catherine George. The little moth had burst out of its cocoon, the wings had grown, and it

was fluttering and fluttering in the candle's beautiful golden light.

My simile would have been better if Catherine, the moth, had not herself blown out her candle when she reached her bedroom upstairs. She was hanging out of her window, trying to drink the night calm into her veins. 'Is that bright beautiful planet my star, I wonder?' the governess was thinking. 'How gaily it sparkles! it seems to be dancing in space. How the night wanes and shines; how the stars blaze beyond the housetops! Did any one ever tell me that was my star? Why do I think so?' As Catherine gazed at the heavens and thought all this, not in words, but with quick sensitive flashes—down below, just under her feet, the well was being dug into which the poor little philosopher was doomed to tumble. Ah me! was truth at the bottom of it, I wonder, instead of up overhead in the beautiful shining stars of good promise?

It seemed to little Catherine as if a great light had come out suddenly into her dull life. She did not know whence or how it came; she did not know very clearly what she was feeling; she did not tell herself that she ought to shut her heart and ears and eyes until some one suitable in fortune and worldly circumstances came across her way. She is only twenty years old, impressionable, soft-hearted. What can her girlish day-dreams have taught her? Can she have learned from them to mistrust

people who are kind, to be careful and cautious and reserved—to wall up and bury the natural emotions of youth?

For the first time in her short life, ideas, feelings, sensations, hitherto unthought and unfelt, came crowding upon Catherine George. Everything seemed changed, although she walked the same walks in the square—corrected the same mistakes in the children's exercises—sat in her old place in the schoolroom. The walls seemed to have opened somehow to let in the unfamiliar crowd of strange new ideas, of feelings impossible to realise or to define. The difference in Catherine was not greater than that which a passing cloud makes in the sky, or a burst of sunshine breaking across the landscape. Out of the vague images and shadows which had hitherto made up her solitary life, came a sudden reality. The drifting dreams and fancies of what might be, had vanished for ever; they were gone, and in their stead it was to-day; and Catherine, as she was—no ideal self to be—who was sitting there, and who had awakened one morning to find herself living her own life in the world of the present. Other discoveries she might make as she travelled farther; and times might come to her, as to most of us, when solemner visions close round about once more, and we realise with terrible distinctness that we are only dreaming in a kingdom of mists and shadows—a kingdom

where the sounds die into silence—where the suns set day by day. But at this time everything was real and keen enough to the poor little thing, of vast meaning and moment—never to finish, she thought—never to seem of import less vital—never, ah, never!

CHAPTER V.

WHAT CATHERINE WISHED FOR.

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries.
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope;
Featured like him, like him with friends possest;
Doubting that man's art and this man's scope,—
With what I most enjoy contented least.

FATE, which for some time past seemed to have strangely overlooked the thread of Catherine George's existence, now suddenly began to spin it somewhat faster, and to tie a few knots in the loose little string. For one thing, Madame de Tracy's thread flew so fast, that it was apt to entangle itself with others alongside, and it would set all those round about flying with the vibrations of its rapid progress.

Dick was a great deal in Eaton Square at this time, more than he had ever been before. The house was not generally so pleasant as it was just then; Madame de Tracy was there bustling about and enjoying herself, and making a great talk and life and stir. Charles Butler,

too, was in town, and often with his sister, and Dick was unaffectedly fond of his uncle's society. Everybody used to scold the young painter when he appeared day by day for leaving his work; but all the same they would not let him go back to it, once he was with them.

'I ought to go,' Dick would say, as he remained to take his pleasure, and Catherine, coming down demurely at the end of the little procession, never knew who she might find down below. One great triumph Richard had to announce. He had sold his picture, and got a good price for it; although he hesitated, to the dealer's surprise, when it came to parting with his beloved fishwife. He had also received an order for the 'Country-cart,' as soon as it should be finished, and once again he said at luncheon,—

'Miss George, I *wish* you would let me put you into my cart.'

Some shy impulse made her refuse—she saw Mrs. Butler looking prim and severe, and Madame de Tracy unconsciously shaking her head. It seemed very hard. Catherine nearly cried afterwards, when she woke up in the night and wondered whether Richard had thought her ungrateful. All day long the thought haunted her. What could he think after all his kindness? why had she been so shy and foolish? . . . 'No, Lydia, it was William the Conqueror who came over in 1066, not Julius Cæsar.'

Meanwhile Richard the Conqueror, Butler Cæsar, went

about his business and his pleasure with feelings quite unwounded by anything Catherine could do or say; when she saw him again he had forgotten all about her refusal, and to her delight and surprise his manner was quite unchanged and as kind as ever. What trifles she pondered over and treasured up! It was like the old German stories of twigs and dried leaves carefully counted and put away in the place of gold pieces—chance encounters—absurdities—she did not know what she was about.

Madame de Tracy, who never let go an idea, or who let it go a hundred times to return to it again and again at stray intervals, shook her head at all these chance meetings. Her departure was approaching—her vigilance would be removed—she could not bear to think of what might not happen in her absence, and she had spoken to Mrs. Butler of a scheme for appealing to Dick's own better feelings.

'My dear Matilda! I entreat you to do nothing of the sort. Dick can bear no remonstrance,' Mrs. Butler cried. 'I will see that all is right, and, if needs be, Miss George must go. I have a most tempting account of this German governess. Charles told me to bring Miss George to his picnic on Friday, but I think it will be as well that she should not be of the party.'

Poor unconscious little Catherine! She would have died of horror, I think, if she had guessed how quietly

the secrets of her heart were discussed by unsympathetic bystanders, as she went on her way, singing her song without words. It was a foolish song, perhaps, about silly things; but the voice that sang it was clear and sweet, and true.

Charles Butler, the giver of the proposed entertainment, was one of those instances of waste of good material which are so often to be met with in the world: a tender-hearted man with few people to love him, living alone, with no nearer ties than other people's children; a man of ability, who had never done anything except attend to the commonplaces of life: and these were always better arranged and controlled at Lambswold than anywhere else, for he knew what should be done and how to make other people do it, and perhaps gave an attention and effort to small things which should have gone elsewhere. It was a kindly spirit in a wrinkled, ugly, cranky old body. Charles Butler's hook nose and protruding teeth and fierce eyebrows, his contradictoriness and harsh little laugh, were crimes of nature, so to speak, for they frightened away women and children and timid people. They had frightened Charles Butler himself into mistrusting his own powers, into believing that there was something about him which must inevitably repel; they had destroyed his life, his best chance for happiness. He was a diffident man; for years he had doubted and hesitated and waited; waited for this sad lonely aching old

age which had come upon him now. His little nephews and nieces, however, had learnt not to be afraid of him on a certain day in the year, when it was his custom to ask them all down for the day to Lambswold in honour of his god-daughter Augusta's birthday. They often stayed there at other times, but this one day was the happiest of all, they thought. It came in midsummer with a thrill of sweetness in the air, with the song of the thrush, when the strawberry beds were hanging full and crimson, when all the roses were flushing. Little Sarah used to say she thought Lambswold was a pink place.

It was an old-fashioned country-house, standing in the hollow of two hills, with a great slope in front and a wide plenteous world of wheat-fields, farmsteads, and straggling nut-woods to gaze at from the dining-room windows and the terrace. There were rising green meads on either side, and at the back of it kitchen-gardens, fruit-walls, and greenhouses and farm-buildings, all in excellent order and admirably kept.

'Oh, Miss George, how sorry you must be not to come!' Algy would say.

'Yes, I am very sorry,' Catherine honestly answered in her child's voice; for she had not yet outgrown the golden age when all things call and beckon, and the apples and the loaves and the cakes cry, 'Come eat us! come eat us!' and the children wandering in fairy-land reply, 'We come, we come.' She loved cakes and apples,

and all good things still, and had not reached to the time when it is no penalty to be deprived of them. But she had to pay the price of her youth; and to those who are tied and bound down by circumstance, youth is often, indeed, only a blessing turned into a curse. It consumes with its own fire and tears with its own strength. And so when Catherine with a sinking heart heard them all talking over arrangements for spending a day in Paradise with the angels—so it seemed to her—and not one word was spoken to include her in the scheme; when she guessed that she was only to be left in the schoolroom, which represented all her enjoyment, all her hopes, her beginning and ending—then a great wave of disappointment and wishing and regretting seemed to overflow and to choke the poor little instructress of youth, the superior mind whose business in life it was to direct others and to lead the way to the calm researches of science, instead of longing childishly for the strawberries of life. But there were strawberries ripening for Catherine.

One afternoon she was with the children, crossing the road to the house; they were carrying camp-stools, work, reels, scissors, the 'Heir of Redclyffe,' covered in brown paper, for reading aloud; the 'Boys' Own Magazine,' 'Peter Parley,' a squirt, Sandy, tightly clasped round the neck by Algy, a rug, and various other means for passing an hour: when suddenly Catherine's eyes began to brighten, as they had a trick of doing, Sandy

made a gasping attempt at a bark, and little Sarah, rushing forward, embraced a young gentleman affectionately round the waist. He was standing on the side of the pavement, and laughing and saying,—'Do you always walk out with all this luggage?'

'We have only a very few things,' said little Sarah. 'Are you coming to our house? Oh, Richard, is it arranged about the picnic?'

'The carriage has not come back yet; there's nobody at home. Oh, Dick, do wait and have tea with us,' cried Lydia.

'I think you might as well,' Augusta said, in an aggrieved tone,—'but I suppose you won't, because we are children.'

'Oh, do, do, do, do, do,' said Algy, hopping about, with poor Sandy, still choking, for a partner.

'I want to see my aunt, and settle about Lambswold,' said Richard, walking along with Miss George. 'I think we shall have a fine day.'

'I hope you will,' Catherine answered.

'You are coming, of course?' said Dick, following them upstairs into the schoolroom.

'I am going to see my sisters,' said Catherine, blushing up. She took off her bonnet as she spoke, and pushed back her black cloud of hair.

Richard thought Catherine looked much prettier when she went upstairs, blushing still and confused, with

dishevelled locks, than when she came down all neatly smoothed and trimmed a few minutes after, and sat down demurely at the tea-caddy.

Outside she may have looked prim and demure,—inside she was happier than any of the children, as she sat there with her radiant downcast eyes reflected on the tea-pot. Never was a guest more welcome, and more made of, than Richard at his little cousins' tea-table. He was to be waited on by them all at once; he was to have the arm-chair; he was to choose his favourite cup. He chose Algy's little old mug, to the children's screams of laughter.

'I think I shall make this my dinner,' said Dick. 'A slice and a half of thick bread-and-butter will be about enough—I don't want to be ungrateful for hospitality, but pray, why is it cut so very thick?'

'Don't you like it?' said Lydia, anxiously. 'I will go and beg Mrs. Bluestring for a small piece of cake for you.'

Augusta and Miss George began to laugh, Dick said he was not accustomed to cake, and insisted upon eating his thick bread-and-butter. The children dispatched theirs, and chattered and enjoyed his jokes, and so did the little governess at her tea-tray. The coachmen were, as usual, pumping in the court.

Again came the sunshine streaming through the window. Dick's hair was all brushed up, and his grey

eyes were twinkling. The children's high spirits and delight were infectious; all Miss George's primness, too, seemed to have melted away; pretty little looks of expression of interest, of happiness, were coming and going in her round face. One of the golden half-hours which are flying about all over the world had come to them. They had done nothing to deserve it, but it was there.

Catherine was still presiding at her little feast, when the carriage came home with Charles Butler and the two elder ladies, who were surprised to hear unusual shouts of laughter coming from the schoolroom.

'They all seem very merry,' said Mrs. Butler stopping with her hand on the lock.

'I am certain I heard Richard's voice,' said Madame de Tracy, to Charles, who was toiling up more slowly, and as Mrs. Butler opened the door, to one person within it seemed as if all the fun and the merriment, all the laughter and brightness, escaped with a rush, and left the room quite empty.

'Oh, mamma,' said Lydia, sighing from contentment, 'we have had such fun! Dick has been having tea with us out of Algy's old mug.'

'So I perceive,' said Madame de Tracy, with a glance at Catherine.

'Come in, come in!' cried the children, hospitably, 'do come in too.'

'I think you may come upstairs to us,' said their mother after a moment's hesitation, 'for our tea is ready in the drawing-room.' And then somehow to Catherine, —it was like a dream—all the gay little figures disappeared, dancing off, chattering and talking still, with Sandy barking after them. The sunset was still shining in, but the beautiful glowing colours had changed to glare. Dick had risen from his place, when the two aunts entered, and he seemed to vanish away quite naturally with the rest. It was, indeed, like waking up from a happy little dream of friends' faces and brightness, and, with the music of beloved voices still ringing in one's ears, to find oneself alone in the dark.

Catherine remained sitting at the tea-table with the scraps and dregs, the crumbled bits of bread. Algy's half-eaten slice,—Lydia's cup overturned before her. She sat quite still, no one noticed her; even Dick had gone off without saying good-bye. As on that day at the studio, a swift pang came piercing through her. She felt all alone—suddenly quite alone—in a great cruel terrible world in which she was of no account, in which she was carried along against her will, feeling—oh, so strangely—helpless and impotent. She did not know what she wanted, she did not know what she feared, but she shrunk from her own self with an aching impatience.

She jumped up and ran to the window to shake her new terror off. She looked down into the yard, where the

hard-working coachman was pumping still, and a couple of dogs were turning over and over in play. Everything was ugly, sad, desolate, that had been so gay and delightful a minute before. Utterly depressed and bewildered, the poor little thing sat down on the window-sill, and leant her weary head against the pane. Richard Butler, coming down a few minutes later, saw her through the half-open door still sitting there, a dark little figure against the light.

'Good-night, Miss George,' he said, with a kind inflexion in his voice, coming in and shaking her by the hand; 'and thank you for your good tea.' And then he went away.

He had spoken kindly; he had said something—nothing; but it was more than sufficient to make her happy again. As for Richard himself, he was vexed, chafed, disquieted. He had had a little talk with his aunts upstairs, which had made him indignant and angry. They had taken him to task gently enough; but all that they said jarred upon him, and stirred up secret springs of which they had no conception. He could hardly conceal his irritation as the two went on, blandly pouring out their advice from either side of the tea-table, when he asked whether Miss George was not to be of the party.

'No; I had not thought of inviting Miss George,' said Mrs. Butler stiffly. 'It is always doubtful in these cases. . . .'

'Not to speak of the danger of mixin' the different grades of society,' said Hervey, who was present, cross-legged, and looking like the Solomon who was to decide all difficulties.

'Danger!' said Richard; 'what possible danger can there be?'

'You had better bring her,' grunted Charles. 'She has got a pair of uncommon bright eyes; and I suppose there are strawberries enough for us all?'

'Or we might take down a pottle on purpose for Miss George of an inferior quality,' Richard said. 'I do think it is hard lines that a nice little pretty thing like that should be shut up from morning till night in a dreary little hole of a sch——'

Mrs. Butler, with a glance at Lydia, who was standing by, absorbed in the conversation, hastened to interpose.

'She is quite admirable and excellent in her own way (Children, go into the back drawing-room!); but, my dear Richard, there is nothing more undesirable than putting people into false positions. . . . . The person of whom you speak is not *de notre classe*, and it would be but mistaken kindness.'

'Precisely so,' said Hervey, much pleased with the expression, 'Miss George is not *de notre classe*.'

'Confound *notre classe*,' said Richard, hastily.

'Don't be blasphemous, Dick,' said his uncle Charles.

And then, remembering that this was not the way to speak in such company, the young man stopped short, and begged Mrs. Butler's pardon.

She was pouring out small black-looking cups of tea, and looking offended with a turned-down mouth; and, indeed, the maternal autocrat was not used to such plain-talking.

'It seems to me, Richard, that you are scarcely the person to provide amusement for Miss George,' she said.

'Ah, Dick,' cried Madame de Tracy, giving a little shriek and forgetting her prudence; she could keep silence no longer. 'Be careful, my dearest boy; do not let yourself be carried away by your feelings. I guessed —I am rapid to notice things—I have trembled ever since that day at the studio.' She looked so anxious and so concerned between her frizzy curls that Dick burst out laughing.

'So this is your fine scheme! No, you have not guessed right, Aunt Matilda. Poor little Miss George is not dangerous for me, but I cannot help losing my temper when I hear persons of sense using the wicked old commonplaces which have made so many people miserable, and which condemn a poor child to such a dreary, unsatisfactory mockery of existence. There, she is just as well-mannered or pretty as Georgie or Catherine; and I am not to eat a piece of bread-and-butter in her company for fear of being contaminated,' cried Dick in a fume.

'Ah, my poor Dick,' said Madame de Tracy, 'you are unconscious, perhaps, of the sentiment; but I fear it is there.'

'I am speaking from no personal feeling,' cried Dick, still angry; and to Madame de Tracy at least his words carried conviction at the time. (But was it so, I wonder; and had Miss George's soft, pretty eyes nothing to do with the question?) 'It is a mere sense of fairness and justice,' Dick went on, 'which would make me dislike to see any fellow-creature hardly used; and if I have spoken half-a-dozen words of kindness to her, it was because . . . It is no use staying any longer, I shall only offend more and more. Good-night.' And then he suddenly took up his hat and went away. On his way downstairs, he relieved his mind by being even more kind than usual to a person whom he considered unjustly treated by the world in general and his aunts in particular.

Women usually respect a man when he is angry, even when he is in the wrong, and Richard was not in the wrong. 'I think for once I was mistaken,' said Madame de Tracy; 'and yet people are not always conscious of their own feelings. But, under the circumstances, we must take Miss George, or Dick will fancy . . .'

'Oh, certainly, if you all wish it,' said Mrs. Butler.

'Will you have any more tea, Matilda? Now, children, what are you all about? You may go and ask

Miss George to the picnic; and then come up and help me to dress.'

Meanwhile Richard was walking away, biting and pulling his moustache. He went along Eaton Square until he came to the public-house at the corner of Hobart Place. There he was stopped by a crowd of children and idlers who had taken up their position on the pavement, for Mr. Punch was squeaking at the top of his voice from his pulpit, and they had all gathered round to listen to his morality. The children had already taken up their places in the stalls and were sitting in a row on the curb-stones. 'Ookedookedookedoo,' said Mr. Punch, 'where's the babby? Throw the babby out of window.'

'Dook! dere it go,' cried another baby, sitting in the gutter, and clapping its dirty little hands.

Richard stopped for a minute to look at Punch's antics: going on with his reflections meanwhile. It seemed to him as if the world, as it is called, was a great cruel Punch, remorselessly throwing babies and children out of window, and Miss George among the rest, while the people looked on and applauded, and Toby the philosopher sat by quite indifferent in his frill collar.

'That poor little thing,' he was thinking, 'her wistful, helpless glances move me with pity; was there ever a more innocent little scapegoat? Oh, those women! their talk and their assumption and suspicions make me so

angry I can scarcely contain myself. *De notre classe*,' and he began to laugh again, while Punch, capering and singing his song of 'ookedook,' was triumphantly beating the policeman about the head. 'Would they think Reine *de notre classe*, I wonder?' Dick said to himself; 'Will it be her turn some day to be discussed and snubbed and patronised? My poor noble Reine'—and Richard seemed to see her pass before him, with her eager face—'is there one of them to compare to her among the dolls and lay figures *de notre classe?*' He walked on; Punch's shrieks were following him, and ringing in his ears with the children's laughter. As he went along, the thought of Reine returned to him again and again, as it had done that day he walked along the sands to Tracy; again and again he was wondering what she was doing: was she in her farm superintending, was she gone on one of her many journeys along the straight and dusty roads, was she spinning flax perhaps at the open door, or reading by the dying daylight out of one of her mother's old brown books? . . . A distant echo of Punch's weird 'ookedookedoo' reached him like a warning as he walked away.

The day at Lambswold was a great success, the children thought. It was about twelve o'clock, when the shadows were shortest and the birds most silent, that the drag and the fly from the station came driving up the steep and into the court. Charles Butler received them all at the

door, shaking hands with each as they ascended the steps. Catherine and the children had come in the fly, and the others preceded them in the drag. The house had been silent for months, and now, one instant after the arrival, the voices were echoing in the hall, upstairs in the bedroom, the children were racing round and round, Sandy was scampering up and down. It was like one of Washington Irving's tales of the Alhambra, and of deserted halls suddenly re-peopled with the life of other days. There was a great array of muslins, and smart hats and feathers. Catherine, too, had unconsciously put out all her simple science to make herself look harmonious, as it were, and in keeping with the holiday, with the summer parks, and the gardens full of flowers, with the fields through which they had been speeding, daisy-sprinkled, cool, and deeply shadowed, with cattle grazing in the sunshine; in keeping with the sky which was iridescent, azure, and gently fleeced; in keeping with her own youth and delight in its freshness. As Miss George came with her pupils, smiling, up the ancient flight of stone steps leading to the house, Charles Butler was pleased with the bright happy face he was looking down upon. It is only older people, after all, who are quite unselfish and feel the greatest pleasure in witnessing the happiness of others.

'I am very glad to see you here,' he said, shaking hands with her courteously.

Mrs. Butler, who was in the hall, looked round sur-

prised at the unusual urbanity. Catherine George herself was not surprised; she expected everybody to be kind to-day, everything to be delightful. The pretty figure came climbing the steps, with all the landscape for a background. The sun was shining through the flying folds of her muslin draperies; it was again reflected in the burning feather in her hat. The lights shone from the dark eyes in anticipation of the happiness which was already hers. What did not she expect?—for the minute, anything, everything. Like many of us, she thought happiness was yet to come, and behold, the guest was here beside her. Happiness is but a shy goddess, as we all know; she comes bashfully into the room, all the hearts suddenly leap and the eyes begin to brighten, but she is very apt to fly if we rush forward to embrace her. 'How remarkably well Miss George is looking!' said Beamish to his future mother-in-law.

'Oh, yes,' said Mrs. Butler, 'remarkably well.'

CHAPTER VI.

MY LOVE IN HER ATTIRE DOTH SHOW HER WIT.

> The summer flower is to the summer sweet,
> Though to itself it only live and die.

THE morning-room at Lambswold was a grey, melancholy, sunshiny room. The light shone in through two great open windows on the grey walls and ancient possessions. A glass drop chandelier, quaint and old-fashioned, reflected it in bright prisms. A shrouded harp stood in one corner of the room. There was an old pink carpet, with a pattern of faded wreaths; a tall chimney-piece, with marble garland, yellowed by time; and fountains and graceful ornamentations. A picture was hanging over it—a picture of a lady, all blue and green shadows in a clouded world of paint, with a sort of white turban or nightcap on. She had the pretty coquettish grace which belonged to the women of her time, who still seem to be smiling archly out of their frames at their gaping descendants.

Through the window there was a sight of a lawn and

a great spreading tree, where figures were busy preparing the tables, and beyond them again a sweet pastoral valley and misty morning hills.

'Ah, how pretty!' cried Catherine Butler, stepping out at once through the window.

Beamish, who had been cross coming down, and who had fancied she talked too much to Dick's new friend Mr. Holland, followed her to give her a scolding; but Catherine met him with a smile and a great red rose she had just pulled off the trellis. And so the two made it up, and stood picking rosebuds for one another, like a Dresden shepherd and shepherdess.

'What time do we dine?' said Hervey. 'I suppose this is only luncheon, Charles?'

'Humph!' said Charles, 'I don't know what this is—earwigs most likely. Dick would have it out there.'

'Alas! we are no longer young enough to go without our dinners, my dear brother,' cried Madame de Tracy. 'Do you remember——?'

'I see the croquet-ground is in very good order,' said Georgie, who had been standing absorbed before one of the windows, and who had not been listening to what they were saying; while Frank Holland (he was a well-known animal painter) walked straight up to the chimney and looked up at the picture.

'Isn't this a Gainsborough?' asked the young man.

'This, ladies and gentlemen,' said Dick, who began to

play showman, 'is the celebrated portrait of my great-aunt, Miss Paventry, the heiress. She brought Lambswold into the family, and two very ugly wine-coolers, which shall be exhibited free of any extra charge. That' —pointing to a picture between the windows—'is Richard Butler, the *first* martyr of the name. He was burned at the stake at Smithfield in Queen Mary's reign, surnamed the——'

'What a charming picture!' said Holland, who had been all this time looking at the portrait of Miss Paventry, while the children stood round staring at him in turn.

'Charming!' echoed Dick, suddenly astride on his hobby-horse; 'I didn't expect this from you, Holland.'

'Ta ta ta,' said Charles Butler. 'What have I done with the cellar key. I shall only get out my second-best sherry; it is quite good enough for any of you.' And the host trotted off with a candle to a sacred inner vault, where nobody but himself ever penetrated—not even Mundy, the devoted factotum upon whose head it was always found necessary to empty the vials before anything could be considered as satisfactorily arranged.

Meanwhile Dick was careering round and round at full gallop on his favourite steed, although he was lounging back to all appearance on the sofa by Madame de Tracy. 'I see no charm in a lie,' he was saying, in his quiet, languid way; 'and the picture is a lie from beginning to

end.' Holland was beginning to interrupt, but Dick went on pointing as he spoke:—'Look at that shapeless, impudent substitute for a tree, do you see the grain of the bark? Is there any attempt at drawing in those coarse blotches meant, I suppose, for ivy-leaves? Look at those plants in the foreground—do you call that a truthful rendering of fact? Where is the delicate tracery of Nature's lace-work?'

'In the first place I don't quite understand what you mean by a rendering of fact,' said Holland; 'I can't help thinking you have cribbed that precious phrase out of a celebrated art-critic.'

'The phrase isn't English,' said Madame de Tracy, who always longed to rush into any discussion, whether she understood or not what it was all about.

'I hate all the jargon,' said Holland, drawing himself up (a tall figure in an iron-grey suit, such as young men wear now-a-days, with a smart yellow rose in the button-hole). 'Art-critic! art-history! word-painting! germ-spoiling of English. Pah! I tell you, my dear fellow, whatever you may choose to criticise, Gainsborough looked at Nature in the right way. I tell you he'd got another sort of spectacles on his noble nose than what are worn now-a-days by your new-fangled would-be regenerators of art. If you want the sort of truth you are talking about, you had better get a microscope at once to paint with, and the stronger the instrument the more

truthful you'll be. I tell you,' continued Holland, more and more excited, 'if you and your friends are right, then Titian and Giorgione and Tintoret are wrong.'

'Hang Titian!' interrupted Dick, with quiet superiority, while his hobby-horse gave a sudden plunge and became almost unmanageable. 'He was utterly false and conventional—infernally clever, if you like. But we want truth—we want to go back to a more reverential treatment of Nature, and that is only to be done by patience and humble imitation.'

The reformer Dick was still lounging among the cushions, but his grey eyes were twinkling as they did when he was excited.

Miss George, who had been listening absorbed all this time, looked up into his face almost frightened at the speech about Titian. Mrs. Butler said, 'Fie, fie, you naughty boy!' with lumbering playfulness. The sun was shining so brightly outside that the roses looked like little flames, and the grass was transfigured; the children were tumbling about in it.

Miss George should have remembered that there was youth and inexperience to palliate Richard Butler's irreverence. Youth has a right to be arrogant, or is at least an excuse for presumption, since it can't have experience; and, moreover, Dick's exaggeration had its kernel of truth amidst a vast deal of frothy pulp.

The Truth, as Dick would write it, was that he and

his comrades were reformers, and like reformers they would have broken the time-honoured images of the old worship in their new-born zeal. It is healthier to try and paint a blade of grass to the utmost of your ability, than to dash in a bold background and fancy you are a Reynolds or a Gainsborough. But honest Dick will find that to imitate blades of grass and bits of fern and birds'-nests with bluish eggs, however well and skilfully, is not the end and the object of painting. And, indeed, the right treatment was already visible in his works, fighting against system and theories. What can they produce but dry pieces of mechanism?

The true painter is the man who paints with his soul, and so finds his way to the hearts of his fellow-creatures.

'She was a most delightful person, I believe,' said Mrs. Butler, gazing in her turn at Miss Paventry. 'She never married.'

'It is very curious,' said Holland, 'but don't you see a decided likeness?' and he looked from the picture to one of the persons present, and then back at the picture again.

'You mean Miss George,' said Dick. 'I've often noticed it; but she has got a much prettier and more becoming hat on than that affair of poor old aunt Lydia's. I like your red feather,' said he, turning to Catherine. 'If I were a woman,' Dick went on, still contrary and discursive, 'I should like to be a green woman, or a blue

woman, or a red one—I shouldn't like to be a parti-coloured woman. I don't know why ladies are so much afraid of wearing their own colours, and are all for semi-tones and mixtures. Now that feather of yours is a capital bit of colour, and gives one pleasure to look at.'

'I should think the reason that most ladies prefer quiet colours,' said Mrs. Butler, stiffly, 'is, that they do not generally wish to make themselves conspicuous. No lady wishes to attract attention by over-fine clothes,' she repeated, glancing at the obnoxious feather and rustling in all the conscious superiority of two pale mauve daughters, and garments of flowing dun colour and sickly magenta and white.

'I do believe, my dear aunt, there are people who would like to boil down the Union Jack into a sort of neutral tint,' said Dick, 'and mix up the poor old buff and blue of one's youth into a nondescript green.'

'Such things have certainly been tried before now,' said Holland, while Butler, turning to Catherine, went on—'Don't let them put you out of conceit with your flame-colour, Miss George; it is very pretty indeed, and very becoming.' He was vexed with his aunt for the rude pointed way in which she had spoken; he saw Catherine looking shy and unhappy. But she soon brightened up, and as she blushed with pleasure to hear Dick liked her feather, its flames seemed to mount into her cheeks. In the fair apparel of youth and innocence and happiness, no

wonder she looked well and charmed them all by her artless arts. There is no dress more gorgeous and dazzling than Catherine's that day. Not Solomon in all his glory, not Madame Rachel and all her nostrums, not all the hair-pins, and eye-washes, and affectations can equal it. I cannot attempt to define how rightly or wrongly Catherine was behaving in looking so pretty and feeling so happy in Dick Butler's company, in having placed an idol upon her most secret shrine, and then fallen down and worshipped it. An idol somewhat languid and nonchalant, with mustachios, with a name, alas! by this time. Poor little worshipper! it was in secret that she brought her offerings, her turtle-dove's eggs, and flowers, and crystal drops, and sudden lights, and flickering tapers. She was a modest and silent little worshipper; she said nothing, did nothing: only to be in this Paradise with her idol there before her walking about in a black velvet suit; to be listening to his talk, and to the song of the birds, and to the scythe of the reapers; to witness such beautiful sights, gracious aspects, changing skies—it was too good almost to be true. It seemed to Catherine as if the song in her heart was pouring out, she could not contain it, and all the air seemed full of music. She wondered if the others were listening to it too. But they were busy unpacking the hampers and getting out the sherry, nor had they all of them the ears to hear.

Some gifts are dangerous to those who possess them:

this one of Catherine's means much discord in life as well as great harmony; saddest silence, the endless terrors and miseries of an imaginative nature; the disappointment of capacities for happiness too great to be ever satisfied in this world.

But in the meantime, Mrs. Butler, returning from a short excursion to the hampers, could hardly believe it was her silent and subdued little governess who was standing there chattering and laughing. Her eyes were dancing and her voice thrilling, for was not Dick standing by?

Providence made a great mistake when it put hearts into girls—hearts all ready to love, and to admire, and to be grateful and happy with a word, with a nothing. And if Providence had made a still further mistake, and made dependants of the same stuff as the rest, and allowed them to forget for one instant their real station in life, Mrs. Butler was determined to supply any such deficiencies, and to remind Miss George if ever she chanced to forget. But poor little Catherine, as I have said, defied her in her brief hour of happiness. She would not remember, and, indeed, she could not prevent her cheeks from blushing and her eyes from shining more brightly than any others present. Her youth, her beauty, her sweet abrupt girlishness asserted themselves for once, and could not be repressed. Nobody could put them out. Even when she was silent these things were speaking for

her in a language no one could fail to understand. If it had been one of Mrs. Butler's own daughters, she would have looked on with gentlest maternal sympathy at so much innocent happiness; but for Miss George she had no feeling save that of uneasiness and disquiet. It was hard upon the poor mother to have to stand by and see her own well-educated, perfectly commonplace Georgie eclipsed—put out—distanced altogether by this stiff, startled, dark-eyed little creature, with the sudden bright blushes coming and going in her cheeks. Mrs. Butler could not help seeing that they all liked talking to her. Charles Butler, Holland (Mr. Holland had quite lost his heart to the pretty little governess), Dick, and Beamish even. But then Georgie did not look up all grateful and delighted if anybody noticed her, and flush up like a snow mountain at sunrise!

Of course, Catherine would have been behaving much better if she had shown far more strength of character, and never thought of anything less desirable than Augusta's French, or Lydia's History, and if she had overcome any feelings—even before she was conscious of them—except those connected with her interesting profession. But Catherine had no strength of mind. She was led by anybody and anything that came across her way. She was one of those people who are better liked by men than by women. For it is difficult sometimes for the weary and hardly-tried amazons of life to feel a perfect tolerance

and sympathy with other women of weaker mould and nature. These latter are generally shielded and carried along by other strength than their own; they rest all through the heat of the day, leaving others to fight their battles and to defend them, and then when the battle is over are resting still. The strongest and fiercest of amazons would be glad to lay down her arms at times, and rest and be weak and cared for; but the help comes not for her; she must bear the burden of her strength and courage, and fight on until the night.

Mrs. Butler was one of the amazons of the many tribes of amazons that still exist in the world. They are married as well as unmarried. This woman for years and years had worked and striven and battled for her husband and children; she managed them and her husband and his affairs; she dictated, and ruled, and commanded; she was very anxious at times, very weary, very dispirited, but she gave no sign, allowed no complaint to escape her, bore her sufferings in silence. Once, and once only, to her eldest daughter she had spoken a little half-word, when things were going very wrong—when Francis's debts were most overwhelming—when Robert had got into some new scrape worse than the last—when money was not forthcoming, and everything was looking dark. 'Dear mamma,' Catherine Butler had said, with her tender smile, and closed her arms round the poor harassed mother's neck in a yoke that never galled.

As the day wore on, Mrs. Butler seemed to avoid little Catherine, or only to speak to her in a cold indifferent voice that made the girl wonder what she had done amiss. Now and again she started at the rude set-downs to which she was little accustomed. What did it all mean? What crime was she guilty of? She could not bring herself to think otherwise than tenderly of any one belonging to the house she had learnt to love. She meekly pursued her persecutrix with beseeching eyes. She might as well have tried to melt a glacier. To people who have taken a prejudice or a dislike, every word is misunderstood, every look offends; and Catherine's wistful glances only annoyed and worried Mrs. Butler, who did not wish to be touched. Had some malicious Puck squeezed some of the juice of Oberon's purple flower upon Catherine's scarlet feather to set them all wandering and at cross purposes all through this midsummer's day? In and out of the house, the garden, the woods, this little Helen went along with the rest, looking prettier, more pathetic, every minute. We all have a gift of second sight more or less developed, and Catherine knew something was coming now that the first burst of happiness was over. An old saw came into her head about a light heart in the morning bringing tears before night.

The luncheon did credit to Mundy and the hampers. There were no earwigs, only little soft winds to stir the

cloth, cross-lights, and a gentle check-work of grey shadow upon the dresses. Charles Butler's second best wine was so good that they all laughed, and asked what his best could be. Sandy frisked about and feasted upon mayonnaise and pressed veal. Sandy had a companion, Mr. Holland's dog Peter, a self-conscious pug, with many affectations and with all the weaknesses belonging to a sensitive nature. He was nevertheless a faithful and devoted friend, tender-hearted and curly-tailed. Sandy had seen less of the world, and sniffed about in a little rough coat without any pretensions, and was altogether of a less impressionable and artistic nature. He loved good sport, good bones, and a comfortable nap after dinner. His master was of a different calibre to Peter's, and dogs are certainly influenced by the people with whom they live. All day long Peter walked about at Holland's heels, quite regardless of Sandy's unmeaning attacks and invitations to race or to growl. Peter only shook him off, and advanced in that confidential, consequential manner, which is peculiar to his race.

Luncheon had come to an end. Catherine looked up, and breathed a great breath as she looked into the keen glimmer overhead; soft little winds, scented with pine-wood and rose-trees, came and blew about. Holland and Dick had got into a new discussion over the famous Gainsborough, and the children, who thought it all very stupid, had jumped up one by one and run away to the

croquet-ground. But Catherine forgot to go. There she sat on the grass, with her back against the trunk of the tree, saying nothing, looking everything, listening, and absorbed. Catherine did well to rest in this green bower for a little before starting along the dusty high-road again. People are for ever uttering warnings, and telling of the dangers, and deep precipices, and roaring torrents to be passed; but there are everywhere, thanks be to heaven, green bowers and shady places along the steepest roads. And so, too, when the tempest blows without and the rain is beating; tired, and cold, and weary, you come, perhaps, to a little road-side inn, where lights are burning and food and rest await you. The storm has not ceased; it is raging still, but a shelter interposes between you and it for a time, and you set off with new strength and new courage to face it.

Mrs. Butler, as usual, recalled Catherine to herself.

'Miss George, be so good as to see what the children are doing.' And so poor Catherine was dismissed from her green bower. It was hard to have to go—to be dismissed in disgrace, as it were, with Dick standing by to see it. The children were close at hand, and not thinking of mischief.

'We don't want you, Miss George,' cried Lydia, 'we are four already; stand there and see me croquet Augusta.' Miss George stood where she was told, but she looked beyond the point which was of all-absorbing

interest to Lydia at that instant. Her sad eyes strayed to the group under the tree. There was Dick lying at full length on the grass: he was smoking, and had hung up his red cap on a branch. Holland, in his iron-grey suit, was leaning against the trunk; Catherine Butler and Beamish were side by side in the shadow. Georgie was in the sunshine, with her dress all beflecked with trembling lights and shades, while the elders sat at the table talking over bygone times. Catherine turned away: she could not bear the sight; it made her feel so forlorn and alone, to stand apart and watch all these people together.

Catherine was afraid, too, lest some one should come up and see her eyes full of tears as she stood watching the balls roll and listening to the tap of the mallets. It was all so lovely and yet so perverse. The sweetness, the roses, the sunshine, made it *hurt* more, she thought, when other things were unkind. This day's pleasure was like a false friend with a smiling face; like a beautiful sweet rose which she had picked just now with a great sharp thorn set under the leaf. What had she done? Why did Mrs. Butler look so cold and so displeased when she spoke? Whenever she was happiest something occurred to remind her and warn her that happiness was not for her. Catherine longed to be alone, but it was quite late in the afternoon before she could get away. The children were all called into the drawing-room by their sisters, and then the little governess escaped along the

avenue where the rose-leaves which Beamish and Catherine had scattered were lying. She was sick at heart and disappointed. It was something more than mere vanity wounded which stung her as she realised that for some inscrutable reason it is heaven's decree that people should not be alike, that some must be alone and some in company, some sad and some merry, that some should have the knowledge of good and others the knowledge of evil. She must not hope for roses such as Catherine's. She must not be like Georgie, even, and speak out her own mind, and make her own friends, and be her own self. It was hard to be humiliated before Dick. It was no humiliation to be a governess and to earn her own living; but to have forgotten her place, and to be sent down lower like the man in the parable—ah, it was hard.

Catherine wandered on without much caring where she went, until she found herself in a quaint, sunny nook, where all sorts of old-fashioned flowers were blowing—tiger lilies, white lilies, balsam, carnations—in a blaze against the lichen-grown walls. The colours were so bright, the place so silent, and sweet, and perfumed, that Catherine, coming into it, forgot her dull speculations. It had been a flower-garden which Miss Paventry had laid out once upon a time, and it had been kept unchanged ever since. Quaint, bright, strange, it was the almost forgotten perfume of other times that these flowers were exhaling.

Catherine stayed there a long time. She could not tear herself away. She was standing by a tall lily, with her nose in the cup, sniffing up the faint sleepy fragrance, when she heard steps upon the gravel walk, and, turning round, she saw a bright red cap, and beside it a careless figure coming along with the peculiar swinging walk she knew so well. Ever after the scent of lilies conjured up the little scene.

Long afterwards Dick, too, remembered the little figure turning round with startled eyes, and looking as guilty as if it were a crime to be found smelling the lilies. Holland thought she might have been an Italian Madonna in her framework of flowers, such as the old painters loved to paint.

'Have you been hiding yourself away here all the afternoon?' said Dick. 'Ain't it a charming little corner?'

The two young men waited for a few minutes, and seemed to take it for granted Catherine was coming back to the house with them.

'Do you dislike our cigars?' said Butler, seeing that she hesitated.

'Oh no! It was——'

She stopped short, blushed, and came hastily forward. What would Mrs. Butler say, she was thinking; and then she was afraid lest they should have guessed what she thought.

What would Mrs. Butler say? What did she say when she saw the three walking quietly towards the house, sauntering across the lawn, stopping, advancing again, and talking as they came?

Catherine's fate, like most people's, was settled by chance, as it were. People seem themselves to give the signal to destiny. Fall axe, strike fatal match. Catherine dropped a rose she was holding, and Dick bent down and picked it up for her, and that was the signal. No one saw the axe, but it fell at that moment, and the poor little thing's doom was fulfilled.

The ladies, tired of the noise indoors, had come out upon the terrace. The children had been dancing—a Spanish dance, they call it—for the last twenty minutes; gracefully sliding about, and waving their legs and arms to Georgie's performance on the pianoforte. The jingle of the music reached the terrace, but it was only loud enough to give a certain zest to the mildness and quiet of the sunset. The long shadows were streaking the hills, a glow shivered, spread, and tranquilly illumined the landscape, as the two figures on the terrace looked out at the three others advancing across the lawn.

'Miss George forgets herself strangely,' said Mrs. Butler; 'to-morrow shall end all this; but it is really very embarrassing to be obliged to dismiss her. I shall send her to Mrs. Martingale's, from whom I hope to get a German this time.'

'Poor child!' said Madame de Tracy, compassionately; 'she means no harm. I have a great mind to take her back to Ernestine. I am sure my daughter-in-law would be delighted with her, Ernestine is so fastidious.'

'I really cannot advise you,' said Mrs. Butler. 'This is a warning to me never to engage a pretty governess again.'

'She cannot help being pretty,' said Madame de Tracy. 'I detest ugly people,' remarked this Good Samaritan. 'I believe she would be a treasure to Ernestine. Those beloved children are darlings, but they speak English like little cats; their accent is deplorable, and yet their mother will not allow it. I am sure she ought to be eternally grateful to me if I take back Miss George.'

'Pray take care, my dear Matilda,' said Mrs. Butler. 'Interference is always so undesirable. I always try to keep to my own side of the way. I really could not blame Ernestine if she should. . . .'

Madame de Tracy could not endure opposition. 'I do not agree with you. There is nothing so valuable as judicious interference. I know perfectly what I am about: Ernestine will be quite enchanted.' Madame de Tracy was so positive that Mrs. Butler hesitated; she disliked scenes and explanations. Here was an easy way of getting rid of the poor little objection at once, without effort or trouble; she would be provided for, and Mrs. Butler was not without one single grain of kindness in

her composition. Miss George had been very useful and conscientious; she had nursed Algy when he was ill. Mrs. Butler was angry with Catherine, but she did not wish her harm; she was, to a certain point, a just woman with her temper under control.

'I think it would be an excellent opportunity,' said she, 'if Ernestine really wishes for a governess for her children, and you are not afraid of the responsibility.'

'Oh, I will answer for that,' said Madame de Tracy, waving a welcome to the two young men. 'The thing is arranged. Hush-sh-sh!'

Madame de Tracy's warnings usually came after the flash, like the report of the gun. Catherine, coming along and listening a little anxiously for the first greetings, caught the words and the glance of significance. What had they been saying? what did it mean? Her quick apprehension conjured up a hundred different solutions: reprimands in store, no more holidays, no more merry-making. The reality occurred to her as an impossibility almost. To very young people changes are so impossible. They would like to come and to go, and to see all the world; but to return always to the nest in the same old creaking branch of the tree. Catherine was frightened and uneasy. All the way home in the drag, through the grey and golden evening; in the railway, scudding through a dusky wide country, where lights shone from the farmsteads, and pools still reflected

the yellow in the west, she sat silent in her corner, with little Sarah asleep beside her. Catherine sat there half happy, almost satisfied, and yet very sad, and imagining coming evils. Let them come! They only seemed to make the day which was just over shine brighter and brighter by comparison. They could not take it from her; she should remember it always. And Catherine said grace, as the children do, sitting there in her quiet corner. 'Oh, I wish I was always happy,' thought the girl; 'I do so like being happy! . . . .'

'Nothing could have gone off better,' said Hervey, at the window, as they all got out at Victoria Station.

'That idiot Mundy very nearly ruined the whole thing,' said Charles. 'He forgot the soda-water. I had to telegraph to G——'

'Thanks so much,' said Mrs. Butler, coming up. 'Now, children? Has anyone called a cab for them? The carriage has come for us.'

'Good-night, Miss George,' said Dick, under a lamp-post; and everybody else said 'Good-night, good-night.'

CHAPTER VII.

'A QUOI JE SONGE.'

This crowns his feast with wine and wit;
Who brought him to that mirth and state?
His betters, see, below him sit,
Or hunger hopeless at the gate.
Who bade the mud from Dives' wheel
To spurn the rags of Lazarus?
Come, brother, in that dust we'll kneel
Confessing Heaven that ruled it thus.

MEANWHILE Catherine's fate was settled, and Mrs. Butler came into the schoolroom next morning to announce it. A sort of feeling came over her, poor child, that it was her death-warrant which this gracious lady in black silk robes was announcing in a particularly bland, encouraging tone of voice. What had she done? against whom had she conspired? of what treason was she guilty?

'Oh, why am I to go?' said Catherine, looking up very pale from her book, with round dark startled eyes.

Even Mrs. Butler's much preoccupied heart was touched by the little thing's helpless, wobegone appeal.

'You have always been quite invaluable to me, my dear Miss George, and I shall miss you excessively, but it

is sincerely in your own interest that I am recommending this step to you,' Mrs. Butler said not unkindly.

'Oh, no, no,' said Catherine, feebly clutching at the table-cover. 'This is too far, I cannot speak French. I could not bear to be away, to leave my sisters, everybody!' And she suddenly burst out crying. 'Oh, I am so silly, so sorry,' she sobbed, 'for of course I must leave, if you wish it.'

'Pray, my dear Miss George,' said Mrs. Butler, still kind, yet provoked, 'do not distress yourself unnecessarily. You are really quite blind, on this occasion, to your own advantage' (and this was a thing that was almost incomprehensible to Mrs. Butler). 'Forgive me for saying so, but I do think it is your duty (as it is that of every one of us) to make the best of circumstances, particularly when there is an increase of salary and an excellent opportunity for improving in French. I do seriously recommend you to think my sister-in-law's proposal well over, and to consult your friends.'

And the messenger of fate hastened off to her davenport, and poor Catherine sat crying, with the tears dripping over the page.

No, no, no: she could not bear to go tossing about all alone in the world; it was too hard, too hard. What was she to do? Who would tell her what she was to do? Once a wild thought came to her of asking Dick to help her; he was kind—he would not let them send

her away. Why were they driving her from their door? What had she done?—what indeed? A swift terror jarred through her beyond the other sad complex emotions that were passing in disorder through her mind. Could they think, could they imagine for one minute? The little pale face began to burn, and the eyes to flash, and her hands seemed to grow cold with horror; but no, no, it was impossible. They could not read her heart; and if they did, what was there for them to see? They were worldly, hard people; they did not know what friendship meant, how faithful it could be, how long it could last, how much it was ready to give, how little it required. And then after a time a revulsion came, and she felt as if all she wanted was to go—to go away and hide her head from them all. If it were not for Rosy and Totty, she did not care what was to come.

She went to bed that night with a heart aching dully, and she dreamt sad dreams until the morning came; and then, as Mrs. Butler advised, Catherine thought of consulting her friends. She walked down to Kensington to Mrs. Martingale's school, where her two chief advisers were to be found, and she wrote a couple of notes, which she posted on her way—one was to Lady Farebrother, at Tunbridge Wells, who belonged to the religious community there; the other was to Mrs. Buckington, who was staying at Brighton for her health. It was another bright summer day; dinner was over, and the

schoolgirls and governesses seemed to have agreed to a truce, and to have come out together for an hour's peace and refreshment on the green overgrown garden at the back of the house. Ivy and creepers were growing on the walls, and there were spreading trees, under one of which the French governess was reading a limp 'Journal des Demoiselles,' smelling of hair-pins and pomatum from the draw in which it was kept.

Miss Strumpf, the German governess (she was to leave this quarter, it was darkly whispered), was eating a small piece of cheese which she had saved from dinner, and a rotten-looking medlar she had picked up off the grass. Some of the girls were dancing a quadrille on the lawn; others were singing and aimlessly rushing about the space enclosed by the four moss-grown walls, against which jessamines, and japonicas, and Virginian creepers were growing. Rosy and Totty, and a few chosen friends, were in a group on the step of the cistern. Totty, who was a quaint and funny little girl of ten, with a red curly wig, and a great deal of imagination, was telling a story; her stories were very popular among the literary portion of the community; but her heroine came to an untimely end when the narrator heard who was upstairs.

Catherine was waiting in the great drawing-room with the many windows and the photograph books, and the fancy-work mats presented by retiring pupils, and the wax water-lily on the piece of looking-glass, a tribute from an

accomplished dancing mistress. She came to meet her sisters, looking very pale, with dark rings round her eyes.

'Cathy, Cathy, why do you look so funny?' said Totty, clutching her round the waist.

'Oh, Totty dear,' said Cathy, holding the children tight to her, and trying not to cry, and to speak cheerfully. 'I look funny because I am going away from Mrs. Butler's. I don't know what to do. I want you and Rosy to tell me what you think.' And then she told them her little history in her plaintive voice, holding the hands tight—tight in hers. She had dreaded so telling them, that now that it was over, she felt happier and almost relieved; it was not nearly so bad as she had feared.

'It is no use asking our aunts,' said Rosy; 'they will write great long letters, and be no help at all.'

As for little Totty, she was so indignant with Mrs. Butler, so delighted at the promise of a whole six weeks' holiday next year to be spent alone with Catherine and Rosy in a cottage in the air, that she forgot the distance and the separation, and bore the news far more bravely than Catherine herself. Rosy, who was as tall as Catherine nearly, held her hand very tight, and did not say much. She was old for her age—a downright girl, with more courage than poor little Catherine, and a sort of elder sister feeling for her, though she was only thirteen. But some girls have the motherly element strongly developed in them from their veriest babyhood, when they

nurse their dolls to sleep upon their soft little arms, and carefully put away the little broken toy, because it must be in pain. And Rosy was one of these. She was not clever, but she seemed to understand with her heart what other people felt. She took Cathy's aching head in her arms, and laid it on her shoulder, and kissed her again and again, as a mother might have done.

'My poor old darling,' said Rosy, 'don't be unhappy at leaving us; I'll take care of Totty, and some day I'll take care of you too.'

'But where shall we go to in the holidays?' said Totty, cheering up. 'Let there be donkeys, please.'

Fraulein Strumpf, who was curious by nature, happened to peep in at the drawing-room door, as she was passing, to see who the little girls' visitor might be. She was rather scandalized to see Rosy sitting in a big arm-chair, with her visitor kneeling on the floor before her, and Totty leaning with straggling legs and drooping curls over the arm. It seemed like a liberty in this grey grim drawing-room to be kneeling down on the floor, instead of sitting upright and stiff at intervals upon the high-backed chair. Even the sunshine came in through the tall windows in subdued streaks, playing on the stained ceiling and the worn-out carpet. The three heads were very close together, and they had settled that it was to be a farmhouse in Surrey, where they had once stayed before.

'Do you remember the little wood where we picnicked?' said Rosy. 'And the farmer's cart?' cried Totty, quite happy by this time. Catherine had all the troubles of youth to bear on her poor little shoulders, but she had also its best consolation. Here she was with the other two children almost happy again at the thought of a gocart and a baby-house, and some live toys to play with in the fields.

When she went away the colour had come back into her cheeks. Rosy and Totty were leaning over the old-fashioned tall balcony, and kissing their hands. She saw them for many a day after, and carried one more vision away with her of the quaint old square, with its green garden and ancient panes and doorways, of the dear, dear little faces, smiling through their tears, and bidding her good-speed.

She did not trust herself to say good-by to them again; and when Madame de Tracy went off in her cab with her maid and her tall grey boxes, little Catherine vanished too out of her accustomed corner in the schoolroom, and Fraulein Strumpf reigned in her stead. The morning post brought Catherine two letters, which she read in the railway carriage on her way to Dover:—

Mutton's Mansion, Oriental Place, Brighton.

My dear Catherine,—Your letter was forwarded to me here from Park Crescent, which I left on Tuesday. For the last three weeks, I had been feeling far from well, and scarcely strong enough to bear the

exertion of my daily drive round the Regent's Park. My appetite also had fallen off sadly, and I hardly knew what it was to enjoy a meal. My good friend and able physician, Dr. Pattie, urgently recommended me to try sea air; and notwithstanding my usual reluctance to move from home, I resolved to follow his advice. Dr. Pattie considers that there is nothing equal to sea bathing for strengthening the nerves and the appetite; and he also has a high opinion of the merits of a fish diet, believing it to be exceedingly light and nutritive. But the difficulty here, and I believe it to be the case in all seaport towns, is to get a variety of fish. I have only twice ventured to bathe, and found it very trying; but I must say that I am daily gaining strength, and that my appetite has certainly improved, although it is not yet all that I could wish. To return to your letter. I am truly concerned to hear that anything should have occurred to unsettle your plans, and make you think of leaving your present excellent situation; but I am not indeed in a fit state of health to be able to offer you any advice. Thinking tells so upon my nerves, that Dr. Pattie has forbidden me to make any exertion of the sort. Your aunt Farebrother is far better able than I am to take your affairs into consideration, so you had better write to her at once, and act upon what she says; at the same time using your own judgment in what you think best.

Ever your affectionate Aunt,

SOPHIA BUCKINGTON.

Tabor Villa, Mount Zion, Tunbridge Wells.

MY DEAREST NIECE,—Surrounded as I am by duties that to every humble Christian spirit stand first and foremost in the path of life, I have but little leisure or inclination to attend to anything belonging to this world rather than to the next. I am the last person to whom you should apply for counsel, except, indeed, in matters relating to your spiritual welfare, for I have made it a rule never to waste time or thought over the trifling cares of every-day life. My sister, Mrs. Buckington, is better versed in worldly wisdom than I am, and I should recommend you always to ask and follow her advice in your little dilemmas; but you must not think that I am neglectful of you,

or that I am not always ready to give my poor help in those subjects which lie within my field of work and thought. Only yesterday I had an opportunity of speaking long and earnestly about you with my dear friend and pastor, Mr. Bland. He and I both agreed that should you decide upon going to France, the one essential point to be considered is whether a young and feeble mind does not run a great risk of falling into the too-tempting snares of Popery. But then again, Mr. Bland said, who could tell but that you might be the humble means of bringing some of those lost sheep to light! Surely it would be well to be provided with a few simple tracts, which you could distribute whenever you saw a fitting moment. Before you leave London, do not fail to go to the Religious Tract Society in Piccadilly, and ask for the Rev. Walpole Bland's Tracts for home and foreign use. By presenting a card of Mr. Bland's that I enclose, you will get them at the reduced rate of half-a-crown a hundred—a small sum, indeed, for so great a treasure! I should also be glad if you would take with you to France a little parcel of Irish point lace, for which the French ladies (always so fond of dress) would, I dare say, like to raffle thirty tickets, 12*s.* 6*d.* each, for the benefit of the Polish Protestant colporteurs.

I shall be glad to hear that you are getting on satisfactorily, and believe me,

My dear Catherine,
Yours affectionately,
P. G. FAREBROTHER.

Catherine sighed as she folded up the two letters and put them into her pocket. It was not the first time she had corresponded with her stepmother's sisters, but she was too sad to take things philosophically and to laugh.

All the way Madame de Tracy was in high spirits; she was delighted to get back to her children, to carry off Miss George, to have secured a pure English accent for

Nanine, and Henri, and Madelaine. She sat surrounded by bags of which the contents seemed to fly from one to the other, like in some one of those conjurors' tricks. From bag to bag Madame de Tracy and Barbe, her long-suffering attendant, pursued a Bradshaw, a rouleau of sovereigns, a letter which had arrived that morning, a paper-cutter, all of which were captured and replaced in their various homes, only to be dispersed and hunted for again.

'Barbe, I have left my parasol in the cab—and my purse! We must telegraph. I distinctly remember laying it down on the waiting-room table. Ah! what a misfo——'

'Madame, there it is in your lap,' said Barbe, calmly, 'and your parasol is behind you.'

'Ah! what an escape!' sighed Madame de Tracy. 'The tickets, and more than thirty pounds, are in this purse, and I could not possibly have lost them; I am utterly ruined, I have bought so many things in London. Miss George, I see your book wants cutting; give it to me, I adore cutting open books. I envy you, you look so calm, you have none of these troublesome concerns to attend to—but some one must do it. Barbe, where is the paper-cutter?'

They had started late in the afternoon, and were to sleep at Calais, and to go on to Tracy the next day. They crossed on a still night with a waning moon. Many and many a sad, confused thought must have come

to the little traveller by the light of the creaking lamp in the cabin. Faces, pictures, all the events of the last few weeks, were dancing about in the darkness, voices were sounding, the children's faces were looking at her out of dark corners. The lamp swung on its hinges, the vessel throbbed and shook, Catherine felt as if she was, indeed, a waif upon a great sea tossed hither and thither by wayward winds. How oddly distinct the voices and images fell upon her brain; Kitty, Catty, she seemed to hear her little sisters calling her through the moans of the sea, by all the names they liked to give her; and another voice sounded in her foolish little ears, and her last few words with Dick seemed to be repeated to her by all the rolling waves.

She had only seen him once after that day at Lambswold. Catherine thought it was a cruel fate that prevented their meeting. It was more likely a sensible precaution. Doors, stairs, conventionalisms, had been piled in a great heap between them, and there is nothing so hard to pass as these simple impediments. The stairs are carpeted and easy to climb, and doors are on the latch, with nice china handles to open them, there is nothing to prevent, and yet prison bars have been burst open, burning deserts crossed, icy passes and steep mountains scaled and surmounted more easily than these simple obstacles.

There was a train to Paris, Madame de Tracy heard on landing, and she determined to go on. Catherine

cared not. The night seemed to her like a sort of summary or epilogue to the little slice of a life which had belonged to her hitherto. She sat watching the black ghosts of trees, and walls, and wayside inns, flying past the windows, the single lights here and there in the dark plain, and listening to the voices at the little stations, sounding melancholy and sudden as voices always do in the dark.

Her protectress peacefully dreamt through the long hours that Catherine watched and wondered. What would the day be like that had not yet dawned, the new world which awaited her? thought the girl, with her wide open shining eyes. Catherine George somehow expected that the sun would never rise, that the land would be always dark, and strange, and desolate to her; that she would find herself utterly alone, and wandering here and there in the gloom. . . . .

She forgot in how great a measure one's future is made up of one's past—how we see and understand things by all those which have preceded them—how it is yesterday which makes to-morrow. The future is never so strange as we picture it to ourselves. A hundred golden threads bind us to it already. It is all one's whole past life which claims the future and draws it into itself. The lesson given long, long ago by the love which foresaw, teaches in after-years when the occasion has come. One thing recalls another, as one thing forebodes another, and some-

times the two together make a full chord of happiness, or may be, of sadness, so grateful and so sweet, that it seems as if it must be happiness.

At any rate, when the next day came Catherine found that instead of creeping slowly along, all grey and black, and dark and terrible, the future had come for her with a cheery clatter, and crack of whips, and blowing of horns, friendly faces looking out, a barking of dogs, some one to help her up the steps, as with cheerful confusion and noise and jingle, they start rattling through the bright light streets, towards the fertile plains of Normandy.

They had all finished dinner at Tracy, and were sitting about in the great drawing-room. The muffled piano stood in the middle of the room; the lamps were placed here and there; the polished floors were only covered by little square carpets, sprinkled sparsely about. Two rows of pink-striped chairs stood in lines from the fire-place, over which the Tracys had erected a tall and elaborately-carved chimney-piece. The furniture of the castle corresponded in date to the mahogany reign of terror in England, but in France at that period all was harmony and fitness, and you need dread no four-post beds at Tracy, no fierce side-boards, no glowering washstands and looming wardrobes.

On the sofa, like a little lady out of Watteau, eating bonbons, sits Madame Jean de Tracy, occasionally smiling

at the good old abbé's compliments. She is a graceful young woman, with bright blue eyes, with a plaintive expression; and as she really has everything in the world she wishes for, no wonder she is dissatisfied. Her life lies before her quite smooth, flat, uninteresting, all sunshine, and not a bit of shade anywhere, except what she can make for herself by raising an occasional storm, and, fortunately, her temper is easily upset.

Ernestine de Tracy dressed charmingly, in white and lilac and pink; she left blue ribbons to her sister Marthe. She was very graceful in all her movements, even when she was angry. Her husband, Madame de Tracy's only son, was a plain, goodnatured-looking man, with a ribbon in his button-hole, and a hooked eyeglass. He was very rich, and gave his wife everything she liked, and attended very patiently to all her reproaches. Ernestine liked him, and was proud of his abilities and indignant at his want of ambition. She was very proud also of her blue eyes, which she inherited from her mother; and as she did not bury her talents in a napkin, they were very much admired in the world at Paris, where she had an apartment, all full of great vases and cabinets, in which she spent her winters. In the spring and the summer she came down to her mother-in-law's house.

The old clock over the chimney was ticking nine o'clock, the windows were open upon a sea of moonlight in the garden. There were glasses and bottles upon a

side-table, where Marthe de Coëtlogon, Ernestine's sister, was playing dominoes with the abbé, who had been asked to dinner. Monsieur de Tracy and Monsieur Fontaine, who had also had the honour of being invited, were smoking in the moonlit alleys of the garden.

Mademoiselle de Coëtlogon had a sweet placid face, over which a smile would break now and then, not very often. She sat there in her long white dress, with her soft hair tied up simply with a blue ribbon, and the light of the lamp falling upon her face and the old curé's bald head. It seemed incongruous, somehow, that she should be playing dominoes, with that Madonna-like head—still and tender at once. She had been vowed to the Virgin by her father from the day she was born. Her life had been saved by a miracle, it was said, and Marthe grew up strong and well, but never like other people. She had a vocation from her earliest youth; never changed her mind or faltered for one minute. She was four-and-twenty now. In a year she would be of an age, according to the French law, to decide for herself. No one could influence her: not Jean, her brother-in-law, who could not bear the subject named before him; not her mother, a widow, who, wistful, half-timid, half-angry, scolded, entreated, cried, and implored and forbade in vain. Ernestine, her sister, was the only one of them who did not really object; on the contrary, such devotion seemed to reflect a certain credit on the family. But all the same Madame de

Tracy, at her mother's desire, did her best to distract her sister from her intentions, by taking Marthe all one year into the world. Madame de Coëtlogon, too, accompanied her daughter. Toilettes, *parties*, music, gaieties of every description, poor Marthe endured in patience; but all these well-meant distractions had a very different effect to that which the poor mother hoped and longed for.

It seems strange to us commonplace, common-sense Protestant people, in these days of commonplace and common-sense, living in the rough and ready world of iron, of progress, of matter-of-fact, to hear of passionate revival and romance and abstract speculation, to be told of the different experiences of living beings now existing together. While the still women go gliding along their convent passages to the sound of the prayer-bells, with their long veils hanging between them and the coarse hard world of every day, the vulgar, careworn toilers, the charwomen and factory hands of life at their unceasing toil, amid squalor and grime and oaths and cruel denseness; the hard-worked mothers of sickly children are slaving day after day, in common lodging-houses, feeding on hard fare, scraps and ends from the butchers' shops, or refuse and broken victuals from some rich neighbour's kitchen; while others, again, warmed and fed in the body, weary and starving mentally, are struggling through passionate sorrow and privation. . . .

Are work and suffering the litanies of some lives, one

wonders? are patience and pain and humiliation, the fasts and the penances of others? No veils hang between the hard, brazen faces and the world; no convent bars enclose them other than the starting, ill-built brick walls of their shabby homes and lodging-places. But who shall say that the struggles, the pangs, prayers, outcries of all these women, differently expressed and experienced though they are, do not go up together in one common utterance to that place where there is pity for the sorrowful and compassion for the weary?

Dick Butler, who had a tender heart himself, said one day, smoking his pipe, to some one who had cried out that she could not understand how the good God who made the little ones so pretty and so touching could bear to hear them weep for pain—'People seem to think themselves in some ways superior to Heaven itself when they complain of the sorrow and want round about them. And yet it is not the Devil for certain who puts pity into their hearts.'

It is vain to try to answer such questions, but it is difficult not to wonder and speculate, as every day one sees stranger and subtler contrasts and forms of life. There is Marthe placidly waiting her dim future. There is the good mother of the family, useful, busy, happy, bright-eyed and light-hearted, approaching her home, of which the shimmer seems to cheer and warm her as she sees it gleaming from a distance. There is the forlorn

little traveller from Jerusalem, whose wounds have been bound up with wine and oil, coming in her charge to the inn.

Madame Jean de Tracy was just popping a chocolate bonbon into her mouth when her husband and M. Fontaine came in from the garden.

'Madame, we have just seen a carriage turn into the long avenue,' said M. Fontaine, hastening to tell the news; 'we surmise that it may be madame votre belle-mère returning.'

'It is certain to be her,' cried Ernestine; 'she told us not to expect her; and it is so late too.'

'It is no use going to meet her, she will be here directly,' said Jean, walking to the door in his deliberate way.

Almost directly there was a sound of voices, of exclamations—the cook, the valet-de-chambre, Sidonie, Madame Jean's maid, appeared to announce the safe arrival of the travellers. A couple of dogs came in barking—even the children's bonne came rushing down from upstairs; the game of dominoes was interrupted; Jean embraced his mother very affectionately as she entered the room; Fontaine hovered about deeply interested in the meeting, and hastened to relieve Madame de Tracy of her parasol; parcels were wildly handed about like buckets at a conflagration; then came more embraces, explanations, and exclamations. 'You never came to meet me. I

forgot to post my letter. Casimir brought us up in his little carriage.' 'Unfortunately we have dined. There is sure to be something. Bon jour, Barbe, here you are returned from England!' 'We nearly did not get home at all; old Chrétien ran his cart up against us. He was quite tipsy. Oh, I am sure of it. Give us something to eat, for I am famished.' All this is a crescendo, which was brought to a climax by a sudden shriek from Madame Jean.

'Who is that in the window?' she cried, pointing. 'Look, there is somebody;' and she seized her husband's arm.

'I am really too forgetful. Come here, my dear child,' cried Madame de Tracy. 'Here is my dear young friend, Miss George, Ernestine; I have persuaded her to come back with me.'

At this incantation the little apparition who had been standing clasping her great warm shawl, and childishly absorbed in the scene, wondering who each person could be, advanced blushing, with ruffled hair, and trailing her long draperies. She looked up into their faces with that confiding way she had. Madame Jean made her a little inclination; Jean came up and goodnaturedly shook hands, *à l'Anglaise*; Monsieur Fontaine, parasol in hand, bowed profoundly. Tired as she was, hungry, preoccupied by her return home, an idea flashed through Madame de Tracy's

fertile mind at that instant, which, alas! unlike many of her ideas, she was destined to put into execution.

'Monsieur Fontaine, our excellent maire,' said she, going on with her introductions; 'Mademoiselle de Coëtlogon, M. l'Abbé Verdier. Ernestine, we will give Miss George the yellow room, and some supper. My dear child, I am dying of hunger. I have eaten nothing but little tartlets all day.'

The tartlets, the château, the moonlight, the ladies, the whole journey, seemed to come out of the 'Arabian Nights,' Catherine thought, only the abbé did not belong to them. The quiet little old man, sitting in the corner, caused a thrill to this stern Protestant of which he was happily unconscious.

Catherine and her protectress supped in the great dining-room—a long and lofty room, with a fine ceiling, and many tall windows, barred and shuttered. The one lamp only lighted the table, where cold meat and cream cheese, and a melon and grapes, were spread. Jean accompanied them, and so did Ernestine, who flung a pretty white hood over her head, and sat watching them at their meal.

'And your grandmother, how is she?' asked Madame de Tracy of her son.

'She is as usual,' said Jean; 'she has heard of your return, and Baptiste has just come down to ask for a little supper for her from your table. Miss George, you do not

eat. You must get a good appetite at Tracy. I hope you are going to stay with us for some time.'

Again Catherine blushed up, and looked from her host to the little lady with the bright eyes. 'I thought—I hoped,' she stammered——

'We have got her safe,' interrupted Madame de Tracy, flurriedly, carving away at a cold chicken. 'We are not going to part from her.' Poor lady, her courage was failing her somewhat. She did not like the looks Madame Jean was casting at her little *protégée*. She made haste to send Catherine to bed as soon as she had done her supper. Baptiste, with a candle, and Barbe, were both deputed to show Miss George the way up the broad stone stairs, with curiously-scrolled iron railings, along a great stone passage, dark with shadows, and with windows at intervals looking on the moonlit courtyard. Their footsteps echoed, and their moon-shadows flitted along with them. Catherine looked out once, and saw a figure crossing the court. The iron gates opened to let it out, and she recognised the tall dark gentleman they had called Monsieur Fontaine. 'I imagined he was Monsieur de Tracy when I first came in,' Catherine thought. 'They were both very kind.'

'What is that distant noise?' she asked Barbe, as she followed her up more stairs and passages.

'That is the sound of the sea, mademoiselle,' said

Barbe. 'We hear it very well from here when the wind blows in this direction.'

Catherine dreamt of the sea that night, of her journey, of the abbé and Monsieur Fontaine, of Beamish playing his marches and sonatas in Dick's studio. She dreamt that she heard the music even, and then, somehow, she herself was playing, and they were all listening to her; but the notes would not strike, in vain she tried, she could bring forth no sound; and the sea came nearer and nearer all the time, and the waves flowed in tune. It was a horrible dream, though when she awoke there was nothing much in it.

CHAPTER VIII.

REINE.

Did she speak, or did she only sign?
Or did she put a word into her face,
And look, and so impress you with the word?
Or leave it in the foldings of her gown?
Aurora Leigh.

THE tide which sways between the two great shores of England and of France sometimes beats against our chalk cliffs, which spread in long low lines gleaming tranquilly in the sun, while the great wave-armies roll up with thundering might to attack them; sometimes it rushes over the vast sand-plains and sand-hills, the dunes and the marshes of France, spreading and spreading until its fury of approach is spent, and then perhaps, as the sun begins to set, and the sky to clear, suddenly the water stills and brightens, and the fishing-boats put out to sea with the retiring tide. Some people living on the shores listen to the distant moan of the waters as they roll and roll away;—some are so used by long custom that they scarcely heed the sad echoing. But others are never accustomed. One woman has told me that for years after

she first came to live in her husband's house by the sea, the consciousness of its moan never left her. She never could grow used to it. It haunted her in her sleep, in her talk, in her daily occupations. She thought at one time she should go mad if the sound did not cease; it would die away into the distance, and then come rolling nearer and louder, with passionate sobs and sudden moans, and the wild startling discordant cries of the water-birds. She had a foolish superstition that she should be happy when she ceased to hear the moan of the sea.

What is this strange voice of nature that says with one utterance so many unlike things? Is it that we only hear the voice of our own hearts in the sound of the waves, in the sad cries of birds as they fly, of animals, the shivering of trees, the creaking and starting of the daily familiar things all about their homes?

This echo of the sea, which to some was a complaint and a reproach, was to Reine Chrétien like the voice of a friend and teacher—of a religion almost. There are images so natural and simple that they become more than mere images and symbols; and to her, when she looked at the gleaming immensity, it was almost actually and in truth to her the great sea, upon the shores of which we say we are as children playing with the pebbles. It was her formula. Her prayers went out unconsciously towards the horizon, as some pray looking towards heaven, in the words which their fathers have used; and some

pray by the pains they suffer; and some by the love which is in them; and some, again, without many words, pray in their lives and their daily work, but do not often put into actual phrases and periphrases the story of their labours and weariness and effort. The other children on the shore are sometimes at variance with these latter in their play; for while they are all heaping up their stores of pebbles, and stones, and shells, and building strange fantastic piles, and drawing intricate figures upon the sand, and busily digging foundations which the morning tides come and sweep away, suddenly they seem to grow angry, and they wrathfully pick up the pebbles and fling them at one another, wounding, and cutting, and bruising with the sharp edges.

How long ago is it since the children at their play were striking the flints together to make fires to burn the impious ones who dared to point to the advancing tides and say, See, they come to wash away your boundaries. The advancing tides, thanks be to God, have in their turn put out those cruel fires; but sharp stones still go flying through the air, and handfuls of sand, and pebbles, and long straggling bunches of sea-weed that do no great harm, perhaps, but which sting and draggle where they fall.

Reine, on her sea-shore, picked up her stones with the rest of us, and carefully treasured the relics which she inherited from her mother, the good Catholic, since whose

death her life would have been a sad one if it had not been so full of small concerns of unintermitting work. She, too, like the other woman of whom I have been writing, heard the sound of the sea as she went about her daily occupations, but to Reine it seemed like the supplement and encouragement of her lonely life. She listened to it as she went her rounds from the great kitchen to the outer boundaries of the farm, across the orchards and fields to the garden a mile off where her beans were growing, or sometimes sitting, resting by the blazing hearth, where the wood was heaped and the dried colza grass flaring.

Reine's religion was that in which she had been brought up from a child. Her mother professed the same faith as the Marions, and the Isabeaus, and the Picards of the place. She had used the same words and outward signs as her husband until his death—as old Pierre Chrétien, the grandfather—but their sense was not the same. The old grandfather in his blouse rather avoided contemplating the future. He had a pretty clear idea of a place not unlike the chapel of the Delivrande, only larger, with statuettes at intervals, and Monsieur le Curé triumphant. It was more comfortable, on the whole, to retire to the kitchen of the Golden Sun, where Pélottier dispensed cider and good wine at twopence a bottle, and from whence Pierre's granddaughter, with angry, dogged eyes, had fetched him away on more than one occasion:

a terrible apparition in her beauty and her indignation. The children themselves would fly before her on such occasions, and they were generally her best friends.

Reine was one of those people whose inner life works upon their outer life, and battles with it. She had inherited her mother's emotional nature, and her father's strong and vigorous constitution. She was strong where her mother had been weak. She had thoughts and intuitions undreamt of by those among whom she lived. But things went crossways with her, and she suffered from it. She was hard and rough at times, and had not that gentleness and openness which belong to education and to culture. Beyond the horizon dawned for her the kingdom of saints and martyrs, for which her mother before her had longed as each weary day went by: the kingdom where, for the poor woman, the star-crowned Queen of Heaven reigned with pitiful eyes. Reine did not want pity or compassion as yet. She was a woman with love in her heart, but she was not tender, as some are, or long-suffering; she was not unselfish, as others who abnegate and submit until nothing remains but a soulless body, a cataleptic subject mesmerised by a stronger will. She was not humble, easily entreated, unsuspicious of evil. The devil and his angels had sown tares enough in her heart to spring up in the good soil thick and rank and abundant; only it was good soil in which they were growing, and in which the grain of

mustard-seed would spring up too, and become a great tree in time, with wide-spreading branches, although the thick weeds and poisonous grasses were tangling in a wilderness at its root.

Reine on her knees, under the great arch of Bayeux Cathedral, with the triumphant strains of the anthem resounding in her ears, would have seemed to some a not unworthy type of the Peasant Girl of Domremy, in Lorraine. As the music rang higher and shriller, the vibrations of the organ filled the crowded edifice. Priests stood at the high altar celebrating their mysteries; the incense was rising in streams from the censers; people's heads went bending lower and lower; to Reine a glory seemed to fill the place like the glory of the pink cloud in the Temple, and the heavens of her heart were unfolded. The saints and visions of her dim imaginations had no high commands for their votary; they did not bid her deliver her country, but sent her home to her plodding ways and her daily task, moved, disturbed, with a gentler fire in her eye, and with the soft chord in her voice stirred and harmonising its harsher tone.

Reine's voice was a peculiar one, and must have struck anyone hearing it for the first time. It rang odd, sudden, harmonious, with a sort of jar in it, or chord. Voices of this quality are capable of infinite modulation. Sometimes they soften into 'gay, yet melancholy music, like Mozart's,' of which they always remind me; sometimes

they harden into the roughest and iciest of discordant accents.

She liked going back by herself, after the service was over, quietly across the plain. She was strong, and the three miles to Tracy, skirting the road and the cornfields, were no fatigue to her, especially in the summer when the corn was waving gold, and the blue bright flowers and the poppies blazed among the tall yellow stalks. Sometimes Reine would ride back on her donkey. This was when she stopped at a low long house with windows opening on the street at the entrance of the town, at the door of which she would find poor Annette waiting patiently, tied to a ring in the wall.

On these occasions Reine would go to the window and call out in her kindest voice:—'Eh bien, Madame Marteau, am I to have Josette to-day to come and play with the little chickens?'

Josette was Reine's goddaughter, who had been christened Josephine Marie Reine des Cieux, after her 'marraine.' She was a tiny little girl, with two round eyes and a little tight black cap tied under her chin, and a little black stuff pinafore and trousers to match. Reine was fond of the child, and charming with her. She was one of those people who are like angels when they protect and take care of others, and who are hard, ungrateful, suspicious, unjust, to those to whom they are obliged to look up.

On this particular Sunday, while the luncheon trays were steaming into the dining-room in Eaton Square, with Dick driving up to the door in a hansom, and Mr. Butler still rustling the 'Observer' in his study, while Beamish and Catherine were slowly walking home from church, and little Catherine, who had preceded them, was standing all by herself in the schoolroom, vacantly plaiting and unplaiting the tassel of the blind, and pulling the ragged ends, and thinking of the future looming darkly, —it was her last day in the dismal little bastille; and now that the end was come, she looked back with a child's passion of persistence and longing to the threads and straws with which she had beguiled her time;—while all this was going on in one small corner of the world, in another Reine was pulling out her strong arms, and lifting little Josette on to the donkey's back.

Josette's mother—a careworn woman in shabby clothes—was standing in the sun, shading her dimmed eyes—the light dazzled poor Madame Marteau. Her life was spent in a sort of twilight gloom, nursing the bedridden husband whose voice even now might be heard muttering and calling from an inner room. The poor woman looked on with a glimpse of pleasure in her sad face, grateful to Reine for carrying off the little maiden into a wholesome bright atmosphere, where there were flowers growing, and little chickens running about, and a little boy to play with sometimes, to a place where Josette

expanded with delight in all the glory of childhood, instead of being dwarfed into a precocious little woman by Père Marteau's railings and scoldings.

'Well, Josette, what does one say?' said Madame Marteau.

'Bo zour, marraine,' lisped Josette, hanging her head, and pretending to be shy.

'Josette is coming home with me,' said Reine, 'to see Belette and Miné, and to ask Petitpère to give her some briôche,' to all of which propositions Josette nodded her head. And then she said something which sounded like J'allonsvoïrletitoto.

'They begin soon enough,' said Madame Marteau, shrugging her weary shoulders. 'She is always talking about le petit Toto. M. Fontaine must take care. . . . .'

Here, like a distant roll of musketry, came a volley of r-r-r's from the inner room. Reine frowned and turned away. Madame Marteau hastily nodded good-by, and passed in, disappearing into the gloom, while Reine and little Josette rode on together through the sunlit fields.

Josette had her wish, and Toto was allowed to come and spend the day with her. Toto's grandmother favoured Mademoiselle Chrétien, and never denied her requests. The two children dined with Reine and her father in the great dark farm-kitchen. They had soup with bread in it, and cider and stewed beef and cabbage, and as much galette as they could eat. Reine took care

of them and old Chrétien; she poured out the cider, and went away herself to fetch a particular dish of eggs which her grandfather liked. Dominique dined with them too. The great dog came marching in through the open door; the cocks and hens came and peeped at them. Outside it was all sunny and still; inside there was galette and two pretty little plates and tumblers for the children to use, and all Reine's treasures, brooches and rosaries and reliquaries, for them to play with after dinner, and Reine herself bustling about with her gold earrings bobbing as she bent over the table. But she was silent, although she attended to them all, and she looked at the door once and sighed.

Old Chrétien joked her, and asked Dominique what was the matter. Reine answered short and quick. For one thing the thought of that poor woman's wretchedness oppressed her. 'I name no names because of the children,' she said, 'but it seems to me it must be like a hell upon earth to be chained to wild beasts, as some women are.'

'And that is why she don't marry,' said Old Chrétien to Dominique, filling his glass. 'Well, we all please ourselves! I have seen more than one ill-assorted couple in my time. . . . Here in this very room. . . .'

Reine flushed up. 'Now, children, make haste,' she said in her harsh quick voice. 'Dominique! you will be here. I shall come back in an hour. Petitpère, here is

your pipe already lighted.' And then taking one child by each hand, she dragged them away across the great deserted-looking court, and out at the arched gateway into the road, and into a tall hayfield which skirted it. Paris, the great dog, came too, and Reine pulled a book out of her pocket and sank down in the hay, while the two little things, hand in hand, swam and struggled through the tall grasses. Their heads only overtopped the hay by a very little. Toto made way and valiantly knocked down a marguérite which stood in Josette's way, and chased away a bluebottle which frightened her with its noises. Josette laughed and capered and danced on her little stout boots.

'Oh, the waves, the waves,' cried Toto, as a soft wind came blowing from afar, bending the tall grass and the flower-heads, and shaking a few apples off the branches of the tree where Reine was sitting. 'Come and fish for the apples,' said she, smiling, as the two little creatures came tumbling and pushing through the deep sea of hay.

Monsieur de Tracy from the château happened to be passing along the high-road at that instant, and he, too, smiled good-naturedly and took off his hat.

'Bon jour, Mademoiselle Chrétien,' he said. 'Are you not afraid of spoiling your hay?'

Reine scarcely acknowledged his greeting; she looked fierce and defiant, and gave a little stiff nod, and went on reading a book.

'Is not that M. Fontaine's little boy?' said Jean, stopping and looking at the trio among the sweet dry grasses and flowers. The children were peeping at him bright-eyed and interested from a safe distance. Reine never lifted her eyes off her book: 'Marie, qui avez mené une vie simple et laborieuse, priez pour moi afin que j'apprenne à me contenter de peu de chose et à travailler selon les devoirs de ma condition,' she was murmuring to herself, and she did not cease her pious exercise until M. de Tracy had walked on.

'I wonder why that girl always behaves so strangely?' thought Jean, as he walked away. 'Can my mother have vexed her in any way? I must ask my wife.'

Madame Jean held up her pretty little hands at the question.

'Mon ami, it is not I who would like to answer for what your mother may or may not have said,' laughed she.

But Madame de Tracy had said nothing, and indeed she was a favourite with the people all about. They laughed at her flightiness and expansiveness, mistrusted her promise, but they could not help liking her. Reine took to her more kindly than to the rest of the family; all her worst self would come up when she was brought in contact with these people, who came stepping down from their superior grandeur to be intrusively civil to those who did not want them. 'What does he mean by

his Mademoiselle Chrétiens, and eyeglasses and politeness?' thought the foolish girl. 'I know well enough at what rate he holds us, and I try to tell him so in my way.' Reine was not a bad girl, but the sight of all this prosperity turned her sour. '"How do you do? Take care of your hay"—Madame Jean's maddening little nod as she trips in her Paris toilette, and Mademoiselle Marthe's great blue eyes—it all offends me,' said Reine, cutting the matter short.

This was the class to which her mother belonged. These were the men and the women who had cast her off, never forgiven her—forgotten her utterly. These were the people who would do the same to-morrow again; who would insult her and scorn her, as they had scorned her mother before her, for all her beauty, and good blood and wealth, if—if she were not firm to a certain resolve she had made. No, she would never marry, never, never. Not if he came back again and again to ask her. Reine had an instinct about the person of whom she was thinking. She believed that no one whom she loved could help loving her; but she was proud at the same time. She knew her own worth, and a poor struggling painter, with all his education, did not seem to her any very brilliant match for an heiress like herself, with the blood of the D'Argouges in her veins, and the farms at Tracy, at Petitport, the oyster-parks at Courseulles, the houses at Bayeux, for her dower. 'Venez, mes enfants,' said Reine,

shutting up her prayer-book when the hour was over, and leading them back by the way she had come under the archway across the great court, where Paris was lying stretched out like a lion in the sun, and where Reine looked to find her grandfather on the bench where he was accustomed to smoke his afternoon pipe. There was only Dominique on the bench stretched out on his back at full length.

Reine went up and shook him angrily. 'Dominique, are you not ashamed to sleep like a sluggard? Where is Petitpère?'

Dominique sat up and rubbed his eyes. 'He is asleep in the kitchen,' said he, hazarding the statement.

'Ah,' cried Reine, taking one step forward and looking through the barred window, 'he is not in the kitchen. You know as well as I do where he is gone.'

While Dominique and the children were having a game in front of the farm-gates, which made the old place echo with Toto's screams of laughter, Reine was marching down the little village street, tall, erect, with her terrible face on. Poor Reine! poor Petitpère! He was discoursing very happily and incoherently in one of the little bowers at the back of the Golden Sun. A very little of M. Pélottier's cider was enough to change the aspect of things for poor old Chrétien. He was treating everybody, and offering his granddaughter in marriage to

another old gentleman in a blouse, sitting at the same little table.

'Je te l'accorde,' said père Chrétien, 'avec ses cent cinquante mille livres de rente. Mon ami Barbeau, elle est à toi.'

'Merci bén, mon ami,' said Barbeau, thumping the little wooden table.

'And Madame Barbeau, what will she think of the arrangement?' said a countrywoman, who was sitting at the next table, looking round grinning.

Barbeau looked puzzled. 'Ma femme?' said he. 'Le père Chrétien se charge de tout. Buvons à sa santé!'

It was at this instant that the bottle was suddenly wrenched out of poor old Chrétien's trembling hand, and that Reine, pale and with black eyes gleaming, took him by the arm in her unflinching gripe.

'Come,' she said, with a glance of indignation at the people who were grinning all round about under Pélottier's little vine bower, and she walked away back towards Tracy with her prisoner. Old Chrétien shambled beside her in silence; he knew her too well to attempt to make conversation under the circumstances. Only once a sort of groan escaped her. As they were turning the corner by the church, again she came upon the whole community of Tracys—Jean and his wife, and his wife's brother and sister, and the three children running on ahead.

Old Chrétien attempted a low, uncertain bow. Reine

thought she saw them smile. She gave one fierce glance and walked on: her heart was beating with indignation, with pride and passionate shame. They scorned her and her grandfather. Their glances, their laughter maddened her. There she was, condemned for life to live with a few tipsy men and vulgar dull women, who saw no shame in their husbands' degradation. There were those people born into an atmosphere of light and refinement. What had they done, what had she done, to deserve such happiness, such misery? Why was she not like the rest of her class? Poor grandfather—poor old man, he was only what he had been taught to be from his earliest youth: his servile bow to the grandees from the castle, what was that but a part and parcel of the rest? She turned to him with a sudden tender impulse of pity and protection, and yet all the time a fierce impatience and anger were tearing at the woman's heart; as she walked along the dusty road, she stamped her foot in the dust once.

'What a temper she has, that Reine!' whispered Marion Lefebvre, who saw them pass. 'Poor père Chrétien, she leads him a rude life.'

Poor Reine, she was wrong to be angry, to be impatient, to wish for the things which only time and silent progress can bring about. Like many another before her, she was a little in advance of her days, and of the people among whom she lived. And the price people are condemned to pay for being somewhat ahead of their neighbours, is a heavy one.

CHAPTER IX.

REINE IN HER FARMYARD.

The healthy, wealthy wise affirm,
That early birds secure the worm
(The worm rose early too).
Who scorns his couch, should glean by rights
A world of pleasant sounds and sights,
That vanish with the dew.

F. LOCKER.

CATHERINE found herself transported, as if by magic, from the long dreary brick-enclosed hours to a charming world, where vine garlands were wreathing under cloudless skies. There was at once more light, more sound, more sentiment and drowsy peace in it than she had ever known in all her life before. She awakened to a dazzle streaming through the vine round her window, and flickering upon the red brick floor of her little room; to a glitter, to a cheerful vibration of noises. Some one would bring her a little roll and a cup of steaming coffee, and then, when she was dressed, the children would come tapping and fumbling at her door. Little Henri de Tracy sometimes attempted a réveillé upon his horn, which would be instantly sup-

pressed by a voice outside. Nanine, who was nine years old, and had elegant little manners like a lady, would wish Catherine good morning; and Madelaine, who was four and 'très raisonnable' Suzanne her nurse said, consented to be kissed through the iron-work balusters of the staircase.

The children would lead the way through the great dining-room, where Baptiste was hopping about on one leg, polishing the shining floor, across the terrace, through green avenues and gardens, looking a little neglected, but fresh with dew, and luxuriant with flowers and fruit-trees. Pumpkins, carnations, and roses were growing between vine-clad walls. There were bees, and there was an old stone well full of deep water, like Jocelyn's well—

> Dont la châine rouillée a poli la margelle,
> Et qu'une vigne étreint de sa verte dentelle.

From the terrace there was a distant view of the sea—of the blue line of the horizon flashing beyond the golden cornfields.

One morning Nanine said, 'We are to go to the Ferme, Miss George, to-day, with a commission from grandmamma. We will go out at the door in the Potager, if you'd not mind and come back the other way.' It was all the same to Catherine, who followed her little conductors through the kitchen-garden door out into the open country, and along the path skirting the cornfields

which spread to the sea. Henri went first, blowing his horn, Nanine loitered to pick the poppies and bleu-bleus, as she called the cornflowers, Madelaine trotted by Catherine, holding her hand. It was like the nursery rhyme. Miss George thought of the little boy blue, only the sheep were wanting.

From outside the farm at Tracy still looks more like a ruined fortress than a farm where milk is sold in cans and little pats of butter prepared, and eggs counted out in dozens, and pigs fattened for the market. All over Normandy you come upon these fortified abbayes, built for praying and fighting once, and ruined now, and turned to different uses. It is like Samson's riddle to see the carcass of the lions with honey flowing from them. 'Out of the eater came forth meat; out of the strong came forth sweetness.' There is a great archway at the farm at Tracy, with heavy wooden doors studded with nails. There is rust in plenty, and part of a moat still remaining. The hay is stacked in what was a chapel once; the yellow trusses are hanging through the crumbling flamboyant east window. There is a tall watch-tower, to which a pigeon-cote has been affixed, and low cloisters that are turned into outhouses and kitchens. The white walls tell a story of penance and fierce battlings which are over now, as far as they are concerned. The great harvest waggons pass through the archway without unloading; so do the cows at milking time. Cocks and hens

are pecketting the fallen grains, the pigeons circle overhead suddenly white against the sky.

As the children and Miss George pushed open the heavy doors and came into the wide sunny court, a figure descended the stone steps leading from the strong tower where the apples are kept. It was Reine in her white coiffe, who advanced with deliberate footsteps, carrying an earthenware pan under her arm, and who stood waiting in the middle of the great deserted-looking place until they should come up to her.

Catherine wondered whether all Normandy peasant-girls were like this one. It was a princess keeping the cows. There she stood, straight, slender, vigorous; dressed in the Sunday dress of the women of those parts, with this difference, that instead of two plastered loops of hair like a doll's, a tawny ripple flowed under the lace of her cap and low over her arched brows. As for her eyes, they were quick dancing grey eyes, that looked black when she was angry—clouds and lightning somebody once told her they were, but the lightning became warm sunlight when she smiled upon those she liked. She smiled now, for Reine was a child-lover, and even little De Tracys were welcome, as they came towards her with their bunches of flowers out of the fields, and the pretty strange lady following.

'Who are you bringing me?' Reine asked, 'and what

do you want, my children? Madelaine, shall I give you some milk and some peaches?'

'Out of Josette's little *ménage*,' said Madelaine; while Henri cried out, 'Oh, there is old Paris!' and went and clasped the big dog round the neck.

Nanine meanwhile advancing very politely and prettily, in a smart little toilette, explained that Miss George was a demoiselle Anglaise who was staying with them, and that they had come to request Mademoiselle Chrétien to supply them with butter for a few days. 'Our cows are ill,' said Nanine, shrugging her shoulders, 'and we are all but reduced to dry bread.'

'There are others beside you who eat their bread dry,' said Reine; 'but your grandmamma can have as much butter as she likes, Mademoiselle Nanine, at the market price, since she has money to pay for it.' She did not say this rudely, but rather sadly, and then she suddenly turned to Catherine, and asked her if she would not like some milk too. 'And so you are English?' Reine said in her odd sweet voice, pushing open a door with both her hands. Reine's hands were not like Madame Binaud's, two red paws which could be seen shining a mile off; but thin and white like a lady's. Catherine glanced at them a little curiously as they lay outspread upon the oak, and she saw that Reine wore a signet-ring on one finger—then she looked up in her face again, and Reine Chrétien caught the glance and melted somehow towards the little

thing with the startled look and curious soft eyes that seemed to be taking everything in. The love-making of friendship is not unlike that of sentiment, and friends are friends sometimes in an instant almost, even though they may not have set the feeling to the tune of words and protestations.

I hardly know which of these two women needed the other most, when they met by chance in the silent, sunny courtyard that morning. In after-times, doubt, trouble, cruel suspicion, pain and jealousy came to part them, but they were faithful to one another through it all. There was something to forgive and to forget for each of them, but they loved one another well enough to be able to remember and to need no forgiveness. They suited. Somehow, there was a certain affinity between them which is priceless in friendship. It is worth all the virtues and merits and accomplishments put together to people who care for one another, or who ought to care.

Catherine, who had never in her life spoken to a Normandy peasant before, listened and looked with all her eyes. There was Reine, dressed like a doll, in flaps and apron and ornaments; but Catherine was touched and fascinated by the grave, noble face, the pathetic voice. Alas! she was not the first Reine had charmed.

The girl gave the children their milk out of a great brass pan, standing surrounded by little barrels for making butter. 'Should you like to see the farm?' she

asked them. 'This is where we keep our cider,' and, opening a door into an old vaulted cellar, she showed them six huge butts, standing side by side, and reaching to the ceiling. Each one of them was large enough to drown the whole party. Nanine exclaimed at their size. 'They are half of them empty already,' said Reine, laughing. 'Dominique alone could drink one of those for his supper. I don't offer you any,' she said to Catherine, leading them away, and locking the door behind her. 'I know English people do not like cider,' and she sighed as she spoke.

She went before them through many courts, opening arched doors, into store-rooms heaped with the oily colza grain. She showed them a wheat-field enclosed by four walls, against which nectarines and apricots were ripening. The cows were all out in the meadows, but there were a few sheep in a stable; and at last she brought them into the great farm kitchen. It had been added on to the rest of the buildings; so had Reine's own room, which was over it, and reached by stone steps from outside.

Petitpère was sitting at the table, eating bread and soup. He looked hot and tired, but he got up to make a bow and a little speech. He was a hospitable and courteous old fellow, whatever his other defects may have been. 'Ladies, you are welcome to the farm,' he said. 'Pray excuse my continuing my breakfast. I have been out since five o'clock in the fields, with the soldiers.'

'We have not men enough to get in the harvest,'

Reine explained to Catherine, 'and we send for the soldiers to help us.'

'And have you, too, been up since sunrise?' Catherine asked.

'I see it every morning of my life,' said Reine. 'I should like to show it you from our archway. The sea awakens first, all our animals stir as if they knew; it is a most beautiful hour,' she said, gravely, 'and like a prayer before the work.'

What was there about Reine Chrétien that attracted and interested her so curiously? Catherine asked herself this, and also how was it and why was it that the place seemed so strangely familiar? Had she been there in some previous existence? She turned and looked round about. The window, the great cupboard, with the gleaming hinges, she had seen them before somewhere—she could not understand it. Petitpère went on composedly drinking his soup; Catherine still stood in a puzzle. She had a silly little fancy there would be a bright brass pot in one of the corners, but it was not there as she expected —she could not understand it at all.

Reine begged them to come and see her again, and stood watching them thoughtfully under the archway as they went home across the fields where the soldiers were reaping with peaceful scythes, and the corn fell against the horizon, and the figures of the gleaners with their golden troven treasures stood out with garments flying

against the sky. Then she turned and crossed the court once more, and once she stopped and pulled a letter from her pocket and read it over twice.

Catherine thought as she walked back that morning that if she could have forgotten all that had passed before she came to Tracy, all the people she had known, all the things she had thought, she could breathe on for years happily enough in this fruitful country. But who is there who would forget willingly what has gone before? There are few who would not remember more if they could, if it were even the pangs they have forgotten.

As they reached the court-yard, they met Monsieur de Tracy heavily booted and gaitered, all dressed in white, and finishing his morning rounds. Monsieur Fontaine was with him, also in linen clothes. He acted as a sort of agent or manager in Tracy's absence, and used often to come up to talk over business and bailiffs. They all met just inside the iron gates of the court-yard. Fontaine bowed profoundly to the pretty fresh-looking little Miss with the great bunch of field-flowers in her hand, and the blue ribbons in her crisp black hair. The children clustered round their father, and Henri held him prisoner while Nanine stuck poppies into all his button-holes, and little Madelaine, who could reach no higher, ornamented his gaiters with flowers.

Meanwhile the following conversation was going on:—

'You have quite recovered from the fatigue of your journey, I trust?' said Fontaine. 'One need scarcely ask mademoiselle the question.'

'Oui, monsieur,' said Catherine, looking up shyly.

'And mademoiselle has already surrounded herself with flowers,' said Fontaine, alluding to the bouquet.

'Oui, monsieur,' said Catherine, who did not know what else to say.

'And I hope that mademoiselle is pleased with our country?' said Fontaine, speaking both in his public and his private capacity.

'Oui, monsieur,' said Catherine, with great originality, half laughing at her own stupidity, and moving away towards the house, to put an end to such a silly conversation.

It was like a scene in a play, like a picture on a fan or a bonbon box. It seemed as if nothing could be less serious. The little banality, the bow, the curtsey, it was a nothing, Catherine thought, or she would have thought so, had she thought at all. To the children it was an instant of great anxiety: would the flowers tumble off their papa when he moved his legs?—but Catherine tripped away unconscious and unconcerned.

Poor Fontaine's fate, too, was decided in that instant, when he bowed so profoundly, and Catherine turned away with her quick little smile. Not at Bayeux, not at Caen, not including Madame la Sous-Préfette herself, was there

anyone to be compared to this charming young Englishwoman, thought the maire. As for a *dot*, he would prefer Miss George with a moderate sum, to Reine with all her fortune; and then something told him that the English were so orderly, such excellent housekeepers, caring nothing for follies and expenses. 'Toilette is their aversion,' thought Fontaine, remembering at the same time some of the bills he had paid for Toto's poor mother. He built a castle in the air, a tower of Babel it was, poor fellow, reaching to heaven. He perceived himself passing Reine Chrétien, with a lovely and charmingly mannered Madame Fontaine beside him, elegantly but not expensively attired; he pictured her to himself embroidering by the fireside, superintending his ménage. As he thought of Catherine, a sweet, arch, gentle glance came dazzling his eyes, like sunlight through the double eyeglass, and at that minute Jean moved, after patiently standing until his decoration was complete, and alas! for poor little Madelaine, all the flowers fell off him.

'Good morning, Monsieur le Maire,' said Madame de Tracy, suddenly appearing at the hall-door. 'Won't you stay and breakfast with us?'

'Madame,' said the Maire, 'you are too good. I shall be quite delighted.'

Catherine liked the breakfast-hour at Tracy. They all came in cheerfully and freshly-dressed, and took their places in the long, picturesque-looking salle, with its

vaulted roof and many windows. The food was carefully and prettily served and ornamented; the white bright china glittered on the table; the golden and purple fruit was heaped up bountifully. She liked to look at it from her place by Madame de Tracy, as she liked looking at Marthe's pale, beautiful head opposite to her, or Madame Jean's smart ribbons. Catherine used sometimes to compare the scene at Tracy—the cool green windows, the festive-looking table, the ripple of talk—to the sombre dining-room in Eaton Square, where the smoke had settled in clouds upon the faded stucco walls, where Mr. Butler sliced the eternal legs of mutton while everybody sat round and watched the process in silence and anxiety.

Monsieur Fontaine sat next Catherine to-day; Madame de Tracy sent them in together. She could not help thinking as she followed the couple what an easy solution there might be to all her difficulties. The little thing would be the very wife for Fontaine—he would make an excellent husband. It would be a home for her —the maire's admiration was evident, and Ernestine had been too provoking that morning.

There had been an explanation, ending as explanations generally end, by hopelessly confusing matters. Ernestine declared with the utmost liveliness that she had not room to lodge a fly in her apartments at Paris, and that nothing would induce her to have a governess in the house.

'But it is certain neither I nor your grandmother require one,' said poor Madame de Tracy at her wit's end. 'And we go to V—— on the twentieth of next month. What am I to do? How can I tell her?'

It seemed like a second inspiration to this impulsive lady when on her way to the breakfast-room she happened to see the little scene in the court-yard. The bow, the respectful look of admiration, which said nothing to Miss George, were like signals of approaching succour to the distressed hostess. Madame de Tracy thought no more of parcelling out the future of two living souls than she did of matching her capstrings. As she sat there at the head of the table she talked, schemed, looked after them all, carved out destinies and chicken with admirable precision and rapidity. 'Baptiste, take this wing to Monsieur de Tracy. Marthe, I know it is no use offering you any. Monsieur le Maire, do you prefer omelette?'

This was the first Friday that Catherine had spent at Tracy, and she saw with a thrill that omelettes were being handed round, and great flowery roast potatoes and fried fish. There were, however, chickens too, and cutlets, of which, as a Protestant, she felt bound to partake. So did Jean and his grandmother. His mother was of an amphibious persuasion, sometimes fish, sometimes flesh, as the fancy took her. She was by way of being a Protestant, but she went to mass with her family, and fasted on Fridays, when Marthe and Ernestine were there.

Madame de Tracy *mère*, as they called the old lady upstairs, had a dispensation. Catherine was rather disappointed to see them all quietly peppering and salting the nice little dishes before them, and enjoying their breakfasts. She thought of her aunt Farebrother's warnings; the scene did not look very alarming. Monsieur Fontaine, although strictly adhering to the rules laid down by his church, managed to make an excellent repast, attending at the same time to his companion's wants, and passing salt and pepper and sugar with great empressement and gallantry. Catherine herself, before breakfast was over, became conscious of his devotion, and, I am sorry to say, was woman enough to be amused and not displeased by it. Once she caught Madame de Tracy's glance; there were no frozen looks now to chill and terrify. 'I am determined I will speak to him on the subject immediately after breakfast,' Madame de Tracy was thinking.

'Monsieur le Maire, I want to show you my new plantation. Ernestine, little Madelaine is longing for a bunch of grapes. Baptiste, has Madame de Tracy *mère's* breakfast been taken up?'

'Madame desires a little more chicken,' said Baptiste respectfully. 'Mademoiselle Picard has just come down to fetch some, also a little Burgundy wine and an egg and some figs.'

Catherine used to wonder at the supplies which were

daily sent up from every meal to this invisible invalid. She had seen the shutters of her rooms from without, but she never penetrated into the interior of the apartment which Madame de Tracy *mère* inhabited. Once or twice in passing she had heard a hoarse voice like a man's calling Picard or Baptiste (they were the old lady's personal attendants); once Catherine had seen a pair of stumpy velvet shoes standing outside her door. That was all. Old Madame de Tracy was a voice, an appetite, a pair of shoes to Catherine, no more.

Everybody is something to somebody else. Certain hieroglyphics stand to us in lieu of most of our neighbours. Poor little Catherine herself was a possible storm and discussion to some of the people present—to Marthe a soul to be saved, to Madame de Tracy a problem to be solved and comfortably disposed of; to Monsieur Fontaine, carried away by his feelings, the unconscious Catherine appeared as one of the many possible Madame Fontaines in existence, and certainly the most graceful and charming of them all. There was only that unfortunate question of the *dot* to outweigh so much amiability and refinement.

After breakfast everybody disappeared in different directions. The children and Miss George went up into Madame de Tracy's bedroom, where she had desired them to sit of a morning. It was a comfortable Napoleonic apartment, with bureaus and brass inlaid tables, upon

which bonbonnières and liqueur stands and arrangements for sugar and water were disposed. A laurel-crowned clock was on the chimney-piece, over which the late M. de Tracy's silhouette legion of honour and lock of hair were hanging neatly framed and glazed. The children sat with their heads together spelling out their tasks. Catherine's bright eyes glanced up and round about the room; and out across the gardens, and the vine-clad roofs of the outhouses, the flies came buzzing. There was silence and a scent of ripe fruit from the garden. Suddenly, with a swift pang, she remembered that it was a week to-day since she had said good-by to Rosy and Totty, and to Dick. The three names used to come together somehow in her thoughts. A week already since she had bade him a hasty farewell at the door of a room with everybody standing round. . . . She could not bear to think of it, she thought, as she began to recall every expression, every sound, every aspect of that instant, which had been to her like Mahomet's, and which had seemed to last for a thousand years.

The last few days had been so sunny, so easy, so harmonious a medley of sweet summer weather, and gardens and grapes, and lively talk, that Catherine had been too much absorbed to dream. People do not dream when they are happy. For the last few days she had remembered without bitterness. Life seemed to have grown suddenly bearable, and almost easy once more. If she

had known how short a time her tranquillity was to last, she might have made more of it perhaps, and counted each minute as it passed. But she did not know, and she wasted many of them as she was doing now, as we all do, in unavailing hankering and regrets,—precious little instants flying by only too quickly, and piping to us very sweetly, and we do not dance. Looking back, one laments not so much the unavoidable sorrows of life, as its wasted peace and happiness, and then more precious minutes pass in remorse for happiness wasted long ago.

'I wonder what grandmamma is talking to Monsieur Fontaine about,' said Nanine, standing on tiptoe and peeping out. 'Look, Miss George, how they go walking up and down the allée verte.'

'Monsieur Fontaine seems very much excited,' said Catherine, smiling, as Fontaine began gesticulating suddenly, and stopped short in his walk to give more emphasis to what he was saying.

If she could have heard what he was saying!

CHAPTER X.

A BOUQUET OF MARGUERITES.

How should I my true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

About this time one or two people came occasionally to stay in the house for a night or two: the De Vernons, who were neighbours, young Robert de Coëtlogon, Ernestine's brother, and others from time to time. Catherine did not see very much of them; they came and they went without any reference to her. Madame de Tracy was very kind to her always. Even Madame Jean had melted and got to like the bright-faced little thing, although she never altered her vexatious determination to admit no governess into her house. Madame de Tracy had begged that Catherine might not be told. She did not want the poor child to be unnecessarily distressed, and she looked so happy and comfortably settled, that it seemed a shame to disturb her, when, perhaps, everything might arrange itself smoothly, and without any explana-

tions. Madame de Tracy used to take Catherine out sometimes. One day they drove to Bayeux, with its cathedral towers and winding streets and jewellers' shops all twinkling. Another day they went to Petitport: the fishwives looked up grinning and nodding as the lady of the manor passed by. 'Do you see the pretty little châlet on the cliff overlooking the sea?' said Madame de Tracy, pointing to the little house with the pink curtains, and all its wooden balconies and weathercocks. 'That is where Fontaine lives. Is it not a charming little place? I have to speak to him. We will leave the ponies down here at Pélottier's.' And Madame de Tracy put the reins into some idler's hands, and panted up the cliff, too busy and pre-occupied and breathless to glance at the sapphire sea at her feet.

Fontaine was not at home, but an old gentleman's head was to be seen through one of the windows, and a fat old lady with moustachios was sitting in the garden with her hands on her two knees, and her feet on a foot-stool, and Toto was galloping round and round the little gravel path.

'My son is out, unfortunately, Madame la Comtesse,' said the old lady, bowing from her seat to Madame de Tracy, who remained outside the gate. 'He will be in despair when I tell him you passed this way,' she added, stiffly.

'I hope you are well, Madame Mérard,' said Madame

Tracy, willing to propitiate. 'Your son gives me news of you from time to time. What a charming little habitation this is!'

'They offered us five hundred francs a month for it only yesterday,' said Madame Mérard, with dignity. 'I do all I can to prevail upon Charles to let it. Rents are enormous just now. One should make one's profit when one can. But Charles will not hear reason.'

Meanwhile Toto and Catherine were making acquaintance. The little boy had come up to look at the pretty lady his papa had told him about; and Catherine, bending over the low railing and holding out her hand, said, 'What nice flowers you have got in your garden. Will you give me one of them?'

'Papa and I water them every evening,' said Toto, picking a slug-eaten specimen, and holding it up. 'I have a little watering-pot of my own.'

The sea looked so blue, the shutters so green, the sunlight so yellow, the chrysanthemums so brilliant, that Catherine's eyes were dazzled, and she scarcely noticed the curious dissatisfied glances old Madame Mérard was casting in her direction. Madame de Tracy, however, saw them, and quickly hurried Catherine away, for fear she should be frightened by this somewhat alarming inspection.

'Pray tell Monsieur le Maire we asked for him,' said Madame de Tracy as they walked away, bowing

and forcing herself to be civil to the old lady of the châlet.

For Fontaine himself Madame de Tracy began to feel almost a sentimental interest. She looked upon him from an entirely new point of view; a bore no longer, but a hero of romance, an enthusiastic and disinterested lover. Madame de Tracy felt that if she were Catherine, nothing in the world would be more delightful to her than a marriage with Monsieur Fontaine. 'Handsome, amiable, warm-hearted, a good man of business, musical, universally respected: it is a piece of good fortune I never dared hope for,' said the châtelaine to herself. 'I should like the marriage to take place, if possible, before the 15th of next month. It was too absurd of Sarah Butler to alarm me so unnecessarily about Dick.—One might be very comfortable in that nice house of Fontaine's,' said Madame de Tracy aloud. 'Don't you think so, Catherine?'

'Oh, yes,' said Catherine, not knowing what she was saying.

Another time Madame de Tracy suddenly asked her how she should like to pass her life among them always? Catherine thought that she was speaking of her as a governess, and said, with grateful effusion, 'You are so good to me; I am more happy with you than I could be with anybody else. I almost forget I am a governess.'

'My dear child, I meant how should you like to settle

down among us and marry?' said Madame de Tracy, apparently unconcerned.

'I shall never marry,' said Catherine, turning away disappointed, with a wistful, perplexed look in her eyes.

Madame de Tracy did not press the subject, but she went on asking Fontaine to breakfast and dinner, until Ernestine declared it was quite intolerable, and even Marthe gently remonstrated.

Catherine looked happy and contented, but presently, while all was going on as usual, there came a secret change. Outside, everything was the same, inside it was all different. These two existences side by side, 'l'âme et la bête,' as De Maistre calls them, seem sometimes to lead two lives almost apart, leading in different directions with different results. Do they in their differences supplement one another, one is sometimes tempted to ask, and keep the balance even? In one calm and uneventful existence, angels may know of terrible tragedies, of happiness, and overwhelming misfortune, scarcely acknowledged even by the 'bête' itself; whereas another life, outwardly hopeless, deserted, unsuccessful in everything, may from within have won all the prizes that seemed to have failed it.

When Catherine had been a little time at Tracy, when she began to know her way about the house, and the vine-grown garden, and along the hedgeless paths to the sea, to the farm, to the church; narrow paths skirting the

fields, dust-blown, fringed with straggling flowers and scattered with stones—when she tasted her fill of the grapes that were sweetening upon the walls, when she had gathered handfuls of the flowers that were growing all about the gardens and courts in a sweet yet disordered luxuriance—when all this had grown familiar, she began to turn away from it all, and look back once more towards the past which was already beginning to glow with a distant radiance. It was like some one dazzled for a little by a sudden illumination, who begins to see clearly again—more clearly, alas! than before.

She had met Reine once or twice in her walks, and had promised to go and see her.

'I shall look out for you every day until you come,' said Reine, in her odd jarring voice, that sometimes began harshly, and ended in a pathetic cadence. 'It is not often that anyone comes to see me that I care for.'

Reine had, like others infinitely wiser and better than herself, to pay a certain penalty of loneliness and misapprehension which seems to be the doom of all those who live upon the mountain tops. Catherine, too, was lonely in her way, and the country girl's cordial sympathy was very grateful and sweet to her. But Catherine was lonely from outward influences, and not from inner causes. Poor little soul, it was not for the mountain tops that she longed. Any green valley, any fertile, tranquil plain, would have contented her, if she could only have seen the

shadow of one person falling across it and advancing towards her.

One Sunday evening—it was the day after she had called at the châlet—Catherine came down dressed for dinner before anybody else. She came into the drawing-room. It was empty, and one lamp only was standing upon a table, and casting its circlet of light upon the cloth. It lit up a card-rack, and Madame de Tracy's paroissien with its golden cross, and some letters which had just arrived by the post, and which had been left there by the servant. Catherine had a book in her hand (it was 'Eugénie Grandet,' which M. de Tracy had lent her), and she walked quietly across the dark room to the light, and knelt down by the table to read, as she had a trick of doing when she was alone. But she did not open her novel: in an instant she saw one letter lying there with the others, and she started with a sort of shock, and let the book fall on the table, and the poor little heart gave a great leap, and began throbbing and crying aloud in its own language. If Catherine had seen Dick herself she might have been less moved. A calm belongs to certainty which does not come when there is only a hint, a possible chance, an impossible disappointment in store. 'Was he coming? Oh, was he coming perhaps?'

Catherine could not herself have told you how it was that she recognised his handwriting in an instant among all the others:—she had only once seen his initials on the

fly-leaf of a book—but she knew it. She did not need the English post-mark to tell her whence the letter came; here was his writing and she might not read it; here was a secret he himself had closed and sealed against her. His thoughts, his words, were there, but they were not for her. It seemed to her suddenly as if the thing in the whole world she most longed for was that letter—even more than to see him again. Did it come straight from the river-side? She remembered a table in the studio where books, and loose papers, and envelopes were lying: was that where it was written? She longed to take it up and to read the post-mark, and to look at the stamp upon the seal. With a sudden movement like a child's, she put her hands behind her to keep them out of temptation, and then, poor little foolish, foolish thing, she bent suddenly forward and touched it with her lips.

A minute afterwards she would have given, oh, how much! not to have done this. She sat there in scorn with her own weakness, angry with herself, indignant; the red and white flames were still coming and going in her cheeks, when Madame de Tracy came bustling into the room, followed by the inevitable M. Fontaine, who had just arrived.

'This is the only punctual person in the house, Monsieur le Maire,' said Madame de Tracy; smiling and nodding at Catherine as she spoke, and then she went straight up to the letters, and then she looked up

curiously at Catherine a second time, and caught the girl's odd, wistful glance, and saw her suddenly change colour. As for Fontaine, he thought he had never seen Miss George in greater beauty. 'If she were dressed by one of our first modistes in Caen,' thought Monsieur Fontaine, 'not Madame la Sous-Préfette herself would present a more distinguished appearance.' He took a chair and sat down opposite to her in the lamp-light, and began thanking her for her kindness to his little boy the day before.

'Toto has been talking of you ever since, mademoiselle,' said Monsieur le Maire. 'His grandmother and I had some difficulty in preventing him from quitting his bed to accompany me here to-night. Toto has a great deal of character, poor little fellow,' sighed Fontaine, with real kindness and tenderness. 'He has no mother, and one is always afraid of not being gentle enough with him. I am afraid we are not quite so decided as we ought to be.'

It was impossible not to like Fontaine when he talked about his little son. This man was genuinely and unaffectedly kind-hearted and affectionate. He was absurd, prosy, fussy; he had all sorts of tiresome peculiarities, but he was incapable of a harsh or unkind action.

Madame de Tracy opened her letters, and read them one by one. Catherine answered Fontaine from beyond the sea, as it were; from the river-side, from the quaint

old studio; listening to some one else the whole time, to a distant music, playing across all the days that had passed since she heard it.

Everybody began to enter the room. 'Nothing for me?' said Ernestine, coming in, in a marvellous shimmering toilette. 'It is too provoking! people never write—Jean sends me a telegram when he goes away . . . Isn't this from Dick?' she continued, looking over her mother-in-law's shoulder. 'What does he say?'

'We will talk it over another time,' said Madame de Tracy, in a constrained sort of way—and she handed the letter to Ernestine.

'He asks for fricandeau!' said Ernestine, looking puzzled.

'Poor little prodigal!' said Jean, laughing kindly, and in his turn beginning to read over his wife's shoulder—

Queen's Walk, Sept. 1.

My dear Aunt,—I have been working very hard, or I should have written to you before. There is a bit of the cliff at Petitport which must come into my picture, and I am thinking of running over before the wedding. Will you take me and my canvas for a day or two, and once more prepare the fricandeau for your affectionate

R. B.

P.S.—Uncle Charles has been buying some wonderful sherry, he says. Hervey is gone on a walking tour with Francis. The affair is settled for the 9th.

This was the letter Jean de Tracy read in silence. Madame de Tracy for once looked stern, and glanced

meaningly at her son, as he returned it. She folded it up without a word.

Catherine's troubled manner, Dick's proposal to return so soon again, had filled her with vague alarm once more. Dick might be unconscious, serious, amusing himself with a passing flirtation—it was impossible to say what he was about. He had certainly declared once that Miss George was nothing to him, but it was well to be on the safe side. 'We must make some excuse to keep him away a little longer,' thought Madame de Tracy. She wanted to be a good genius to all these people. She liked managing, arranging; she meant rather well: it was convenient to dispose of Miss George, and amusing to occupy herself with these sentimental matters. How bitterly she regretted afterwards the irreparable work she had accomplished! The good lady disquieted herself a good deal at one time as to whether she had not, perhaps, materially interfered with the plans of Providence.

They seemed to drop the subject by tacit consent. Ernestine asked no more questions. Catherine's heart gave one more flutter, and sank down and down. Ah, why would they not at least talk and say what they meant? This was all she was to know. This was all the uncertainty: all her life she might expect no more—nothing else. This horrible instinct of what they were thinking was her only certainty. To Catherine, the sight of the letter had brought everything back with a rush.

Poor little thing, she had thought her house was swept and garnished, and here were seven devils worse than the first who had taken possession. It was an absurdity, a childishness, but she longed for that letter. The sudden conviction that for all her life she should have no right even to read what he had written, even to ask a question or to speak his name, was a sort of passing torture. It lasted until dinner was announced some ten minutes after. It seemed like an hour of agony to Catherine, there in the lamp-light, sitting in her muslins as if nothing had happened. It was nonsense; and yet she suffered as keenly as from any of the certainty that came to her later. From his hand it was easy to bear any blow; but to be parted by others . . . .

'Permit me, mademoiselle, to have the honour,' said Monsieur le Maire, offering his arm.

Catherine suddenly felt as if she hated poor Fontaine, ambling and complimenting beside her, as if it was a cruel mockery of fate to come with this absurd compromise to jeer at her and turn her into ridicule. She had never before felt so sure of the maire's admiration, and never thought of it so seriously. All dinner-time she was silent; she turned from him—she was almost rude. He had never before seen her so little amiable, so inattentive.

Monsieur Fontaine departed early in the evening, very crestfallen and out of spirits. For the first time in his life he told himself his heart was really touched. He was

humble, as most vain people are, and he alternated from absurd complacency to utter despondency. Never until now had he felt like this about anyone. His first wife was a small heiress, and the match had been purely one of convenience. For Reine, a terrified fascination induced him reluctantly to come forward at his mother-in-law's suggestion; but Catherine's gentleness charmed and touched him at once. Here was a person he could understand and sympathise with. He longed to protect her, to make some great sacrifice for her, to bring her home proudly to his châlet and garden, and to say, 'All this is yours; only love me a little and be good to Toto.' 'My excellent mother will regret her want of fortune,' thought Fontaine. 'Alas! who knows whether she will ever have the occasion to do so? And yet,' said the maire to himself, with a certain simple dignity, 'that child might do worse than accept the hand of an honest man.' He did not go into his châlet through the kitchen as usual, but walked down the garden to his 'cabane,' a small wooden sentry-box facing the sea. It had been erected at the bottom of the sloping embankment for the convenience of bathing. A little heap of white stones that Toto had placed upon the seat was gleaming in the darkness. Fontaine pushed them carefully into one corner, and then sat down and smoked one cigar after another until quite late in the night.

Meanwhile, the drawing-room of the château was still

lighted up. Some one had been singing, the others had been dancing, but Catherine would not join them. Poor child, was the music of her life only to be for other people to dance to? Were her dreams of love to be so cruelly realised? Fontaine, with all his devotion, attention, conversation, was not as much alive to Catherine as that one little bit of paper in Madame de Tracy's pocket.

Catherine was standing ready in the hall next morning when the children came running up to her. She had awakened late, refreshed by a long dreamless sleep, and she thought she had shaken off the vivid impressions of the night before. But how relentlessly people are pursued in life by any idea which has once taken possession of them! Everything seems to suggest and bring it back: the very stones cry out; we open a book, and we read something concerning it; chance people speak of it to us; even the children in their play told Catherine that she was alone, and had neither home nor friend to shield her. The children went into the kitchen-garden, and Miss George followed them there.

Catherine sat down on the side of the old well; the vines were creeping up the iron bars, the grapes were hanging between the leaves. There was one great ripe bunch dropping against the sky, painted purple upon the blue. A few wasps were floating drowsily; a bird flew swiftly by, glancing down for one instant with its bright sleepy eye. There was again that scent of fruit and indescrib-

able sweetness in the air. As she sat there, Catherine began to feel as if she had known it all from the beginning. It was like that strange remembrance in the farm-kitchen, only less vivid. It was all very sweet and lovely; but she thought, with a sudden thrill, that the ugliest London street along which Dick Butler had walked would be more to her than this.

Was she never to see him again? ah, was she never to see him again? And as she thought this, his face seemed to go before her eyes. They had been singing a little song the night before at the château,—

Si vous n'avez rien à me dire, pourquoi venir auprès de moi?

it went. Dreams said nothing to her now. She looked at them in a sort of despair as they went by.

'Why does he come, why does he come?' sighed the little thing, clinging to the iron crank. 'Why am I haunted like this?' She felt as if it was cruel—yes, cruel of Fate to mock her and tempt her thus; to have brought the fruit, sweet and ripe and tempting to her lips, and to whisper at the same time cruel warnings. 'This is for others, not for you. This is for the other Catherine, who does not very much care—this will be for him some day when he chooses. Do you wish? You may wish, and wish, and wish, you will be no nearer—put out your hand and you will see all these beautiful, purple, sweet peaches turn into poisonous berries, bitter and sickening.'

'And yet I did not go after it,' thought the girl, with a passionate movement. 'Why does this come to me, crossing my path, to distract, to vex, to bewilder?' Catherine was but a child still: she leaned over the old moss-grown parapet of the well and let her tears drop deep, deep into it. What a still passage it was down into the cool heart of the earth. She heard a fresh bubble of water rippling at the bottom, and she watched her tears as they fell sparkling into the dark silent depths. 'Nobody will find them there,' she said to herself, smiling sadly at the poor little conceit. 'I will never cry again if I can help it, but if I cannot help it I will come here to cry.'

And yet this poor little hopeless sorrowful love of Catherine's was teaching and educating her, although she did not know it. She was only ashamed of it. The thought that they suspected it, that it was no chance which had caused them all to avoid Dick's name so carefully, made her shrink with shame. The poor little wistful silly thing, with the quick little fancies and warm tender heart, was changing day by day, making discoveries, suddenly understanding things she read, words people spoke. The whole pulse of life seemed to be beating more quickly. Something had come into her face which was not there a year ago. She was thinner, and the moulding of her two arched brows showed as it had not done before. Her little round mouth was longer and more finely

drawn; her eyes looked you more straightly in the face through their soft gloom. She got up, hearing voices and footsteps approaching: it was the children, who came running along the pathway.

Henri was holding a great big nosegay, done up in stamped paper. It was chiefly made of marguerites, sorted into wheels, red, white, orange, violet. It was a prim-looking offering, with leaves and little buds at regular intervals, as Nature never intended them to grow.

'This is for you!' cried little Henri, triumphantly. 'This beautiful big bouquet. Toto and M. Fontaine have brought it. You will let me smell it, won't you?'

'The flowers are magnificent,' said Nanine, following panting and indignant. 'M. Fontaine confided them to me; but Henri seized it and ran away. I do not like rude little boys.'

'You must tell Monsieur Fontaine I am very much obliged to him,' said Catherine. 'And you can put it in water, if you like, Nanine.'

'You must thank him yourself,' said the little girl walking beside her. 'I know you like marguerites. You wore some in your hair last night. They look pretty with your white muslin dresses.'

Catherine followed the children sadly, walking under the song of birds and the glimmering green branches. She would have escaped, but Madame de Tracy, with Monsieur Fontaine and Toto, came to meet them; the

châtelaine was calling out cheerfully and waving her parasol.

Fontaine sprang forward. He looked spruce as usual in his white linen dress; his panama was in his hand; he wore a double eyeglass like Jean de Tracy. 'We are proud, mademoiselle, that you honour us by accepting the produce of our little garden,' said Fontaine. 'Toto and I cultivate our flowers with some care, and we feel more than repaid . . . .'

'Thank you,' interrupted Catherine, mechanically. She spoke, looking away over the wall at some poplar-trees that were swaying in the wind. It brought with it a sound of the sea that seemed to fill the air.

'Accustomed as you must be to the magnificent products of your Chatwors and Kieus,' said Fontaine, 'our poor marguerites must seem very insignificant. Such as they are, we have gathered our best to offer you.'

He said it almost pathetically, and Catherine was touched. But how oddly people affect and change one another! This shy, frightened little girl became cold, dignified, absent in Monsieur Fontaine's presence, as she stood enduring rather than accepting his attentions.

'Thank you. They are very pretty,' she repeated; 'but I am sorry you should have gathered your best for me.'

CHAPTER XI.

A PILGRIMAGE.

Methinks I love all common things,—
The common air, the common flowers,
The dear kind common thought that springs
From hearts that have no other dower,
No other wealth, no other power
Save love: and will not that repay
For all else Fortune bears away?

BARRY CORNWALL.

A CERTAIN expedition had long been arranged for the next day. The ladies wanted to shop. Tracy had business in Caen. They were all to go over and dine at the hotel and come home in the evening. Catherine begged Madame de Tracy to leave her behind. She was shy and out of spirits, and was glad when the elder lady acceded. Nanine and Henri were carried off; only Madelaine, Catherine, and the invisible Madame *mère* were left at home. In the silence of the house Catherine heard the deep voice resounding more than once.

Miss George went out soon after breakfast, leaving Madelaine with her nurse as usual. She remembered her

promise to Reine, and there was something cordial and cheering in the Frenchwoman's kindness. The thought of the farm was always connected with brightness in Catherine's mind, and immediately after breakfast she set off along the fields to see her friend. Something was evidently contemplated at the farm. A cart was waiting in the courtyard as Catherine walked in; Dominique was standing at the old mare's head and affectionately rubbing her nose. Little Josette and Toto, hand in hand, were wandering up and down. Toto was magnificent in Sunday clothes. 'Gardez comme Toto est beau,' said Josette, pointing with her little finger, and forgetting to be shy in her excitement. Reine was preparing a basketful of provision in the kitchen—cream in a brass can, roast apples, galette, salad and cold meat, all nicely packed in white napkins, also a terrinée or rice pudding for the children, and a piled-up dish full of ripe figs and green leaves and grapes for dessert. Toto's Sunday clothes looked like a holiday expedition. His grandmother pleased herself by inventing little costumes for him. On this occasion he wore what she called a *turban écossais*. This Scotch turban was ornamented by long streamers, glass buttons, and straw tassels. He also wore a very short jacket and trowsers of the same magnificent plaid. His hair was cropped quite close, so as to make his head look smooth and round like a ball. Toto himself was much pleased with his appearance, and gazed at his reflection approvingly

in a tub of dirty water which was standing in a corner of the court.

'They will take me for a soldier, Josette,' said he, strutting about.

'Come in, come in,' cried Reine from her kitchen to Catherine, who was standing uncertain where to go.

A very odd and unexpected little revelation was awaiting Miss George (at least, so she thought it) as she came, with eyes dazzled by the sunny court, under the old stone porch into the dark kitchen, where Reine was standing, and where Petitpère had been eating his breakfast the time before. The odd-shaped shuttles for making string were hanging from the ceiling and swaying a little in the draught from the open door. There was the brass pan in the corner, which she had looked for; suddenly she recognised it all, the great carved cupboard with the hinges, the vine window looking across the blazing fields! Now she remembered in an instant where and when and how it was she had first seen Reine in her farm-kitchen—how could she have ever forgotten? Here was the picture Dick had shown her on his easel, only it was alive. The shuttles swayed, the light flickered on the brazen pan, one of the cupboard doors was swinging on its hinges, and Reine herself, with no hard black lines in her face, only smiles and soft changing shadows, came forward, tall and bright and kind, to meet her. So Dick had been here before her! He had painted his picture here where she

was standing. When this little revelation came to her, Catherine, who had been attracted before, felt as if she loved Reine now for something more than her own sake. This was the explanation—it was all natural enough as she came to think of it, but it struck her like a miracle almost, worked for her benefit. She seized Reine by the arm; all the colour came rushing into her cheek. 'Now I know where I have seen you,' she cried. 'Ah, Reine, how strangely things happen!'

'What do you mean?' said Reine, with a quick matter-of-fact glance as she shut down the cover of the basket.

Catherine went on, looking all about the place. 'When did Mr. Butler paint you?—used you to sit to him?—was it not a beautiful picture? He showed it to us in his studio.'

'It was like the kitchen,' said Reine, not seeming much surprised, with another odd, reserved glance at Catherine. 'I didn't think it very like me. I wanted him to paint the courtyard and the archway, with Dominique and Petitpère on the bench. A kitchen is always a kitchen.—Mademoiselle, how I wish you were coming with us to-day,' she said, in another tone. 'We are going to the chapel of the Delivrande.'

Catherine did not answer, she had not done with her questions. Here at last was some one to whom she could talk without exciting suspicion. Anyone may speak of a picture in an unconcerned tone of voice, of Miss Philomel's

talent for music, of Strephon's odd-shaped crook, or Chloris's pretty little lambs, but they should choose their confidantes carefully. Let them beware of women of a certain age and sentimental turn; let them, above all, avoid persons also interested in music, and flocks, and shepherds' crooks, or woe betide anyone's secret. I think if Catherine had been quite silent, and never mentioned Dick's name, Reine would by degrees have guessed as much as she did the instant the little girl spoke. Miss George herself was not deficient in quickness, but she was preoccupied just now.

'How little I ever thought I should really know you,' said Catherine.

'That is how things happen,' said Reine. 'It has been a great pleasure and happiness to me.—Mademoiselle, you have not said No. Will you not honour us by coming to-day? It might amuse you to see the chapel. They say that to-day anything is accorded that one asks for there. They say so to make people come, perhaps,' added the sceptic.

'Oh, Reine, what shall you ask for?' said Catherine, who believed everything.

'An explanation,' said Reine, drily. 'I have been expecting one some time. And you, mademoiselle?'

Catherine's colour rose again and fell. 'One would never have the courage to ask for what one wished,' she

faltered. 'Yes, I should like to come with you. I suppose Madame de Tracy will not mind.'

'We can send a message by Dominique,' said Reine; and so the matter was settled.

Petitpère appeared, brushing his tall beaver-hat, and then clambered with strong trembling hands into his place. The two women sat opposite to one another, on straw chairs. Josette and Toto had a little plank to themselves. The children were delighted, and clapped their hands at a windmill, an old cow, a flight of crows; so did Catherine, at their request. Something like a reaction had come after her weariness, and then she had had a drop of water, poor little fool, when she did not expect it. Reine smiled to see her so gay, and then sighed as she thought of former expeditions to the Delivrande.

The old farm stood baking in the sun. The cart rolled on, past stubble-fields and wide horizons of corn, and clouds, and meadow-land; the St. Clair was over, and the colza had been reaped. They passed through villages, with lovely old church towers and Norman arched windows. They passed acacia-trees, with their bright scarlet berries, hanging over low garden walls. They passed more farms, with great archways and brilliant vines wreathing upon the stone. The distance was a great panorama of sky and corn and distant sea. The country folks along the road cried out to them as they passed, 'Vous voilà en route, père Chrétien,' 'Amusez-vous bien,' and so on.

Other carts came up to them as they approached the chapel, and people went walking in the same direction. They passed little roadside inns and buvettes for the convenience of the neighbours, and here and there little altars. Once, on the summit of a hill, they came to a great cross, with a life-size figure nailed upon it. Two women were sitting on the stone step at its foot, and the cloud-drifts were tossing beyond it. It was very awful, Catherine thought.

An hour later she was sitting in the chapel of the Delivrande. In a dark, incense-scented place, full of flames, and priests, and music, and crowding country people, a gorgeously dressed altar was twinkling and glittering in her eyes, where the Virgin of the Delivrande in stiff embroideries was standing, with a blaze of tapers burning among the fresh flowers. Voices of boys and girls were loudly chanting the hymn to the Virgin in the darkness behind it. Catherine had groped her way in the dazzling obscurity to some seats, and when she could see she found the children side by side in front of her, and she saw Reine on her knees, and Petitpère's meek grey head bowed. One other thing she saw, which seemed to her sad and almost cruel,—poor old Nanon Lefebvre creeping up the centre aisle, and setting her basket on the ground, and then kneeling, and with difficulty kissing the cross let into the marble pavement in front of the altar, and saying a prayer, and slinking quickly away. Poor old Nanon! the penances of poverty and old age were also allotted to

her. Just over Catherine's head, on a side-altar, stood a placid saint, with outstretched arms, at whose feet numberless little offerings had been placed—orange flowers, and wreaths of immortelles, and a long string of silver hearts. Catherine, who had almost thought it wrong to come into a Popish chapel, found herself presently wondering whether by offering up a silver heart she could ever ease the dull aching in her own. It would have been no hard matter at this time before her marriage to bring this impressionable little sheep into the fold of the ancient Church. But Monsieur le Curé of Petitport, who was of an energetic and decided turn of mind, was away, and the gentle old Abbé Verdier, who had taken his place for a time, did not dream of conversions. Catherine changed very much after her marriage, and the opportunity was lost.

Petitpère having concluded his devotions, presently announced in a loud whisper that he should go and see about the *déjeûner*; he took the children with him. Reine and Catherine stayed a little longer. Catherine was fascinated by the odd signs, the barbarous fantastic images, which expressed the faith and patience and devotion of these simple people.

'Venez,' said Reine at last, laying a kind heavy hand on Catherine's shoulder, and the two went out again through the porch into the white daylight.

The inn was crowded with pilgrims, who, whether or

not their petitions were granted, were breakfasting with plenty of wine and very good appetites, in the quaint old stone kitchen. The cook was busy at his frizzling saucepans at a fireplace in the centre. The country-folks were sitting all about unpacking their baskets, opening cider-bottles. There was a great copper fountain let into the massive wall, from which the people filled their jugs with water; a winding staircase in the thickness of the wall led to the upper story.

'Par ici,' said Petitpère, triumphantly leading the way; he had engaged a private room in Catherine's honour, for he had some tact, and had been used to his daughter-in-law's refinements, and he said he thought mademoiselle would not care to dine below with all those noisy people. The private room had a couple of beds in it and various pictures—of the Emperor at Austerlitz, and three shepherdesses in red bodices, and coloured religious prints alternately; it had also a window opening upon the little *place*, and exactly opposite the chapel where services were constantly going on.

Reine laid the cloth, piling up the fruit in the centre, and pushing the table into the window. Petitpère made the salad very quickly and dexterously, and uncorked the wine and the cider. Reine had no fear of his transgressing before Catherine. 'If my aunts were to see me now,' thought Catherine, and she smiled to herself as she thought of Mrs. Buckington's face of apoplectic horror at the sight

of Petitpère's blouse at the head of the table; of Lady Farebrother trembling in horror of popery upon Mount Ephraim. It was amusing to watch all the tide of white caps and blouses down below; it was odd and exciting to be dining in this quaint old tower with all the people shouting and laughing underneath.

It was not so great a novelty to Reine as to Catherine; she was a little silent, and once she sighed, but she was full of kind care for them all, and bright and responding. 'Petitpère,' she said, 'give mademoiselle some wine, and Toto and Josette too.'

'Let us drink to the health of the absent,' said Petitpère, solemnly.

But Catherine gave a sudden exclamation, and put down her glass untouched. 'Look, ah, look,' she cried, pointing through the window. 'Who is that?' She cried out; she half feared it was a vision that would vanish instantly as it seemed to have come. Who was that standing there in a straw hat, looking as she had seen him look a hundred times before? It was no dream, no 'longing passion unfulfilled' taking form and substance for a time. It was Richard Butler, and no other, who was standing there in the middle of the *place*, looking up curiously at their window. Petitpère knew him directly.

'It is Monsieur Richard,' he said, hospitably, and as if it was a matter of course. 'Reine, my child, look there.

He must come up.' 'Qui fait de la peinture,' he explained hastily to Catherine. 'But you recognise him. The English are acquainted among each other.'

Recognise him! Dick was so constantly in Catherine's thoughts, that, if he had suddenly appeared in the place of the Virgin on the high altar of the chapel, I think she would scarcely have been very much surprised after the first instant. That he should be there seemed a matter of course; that he should be absent was the only thing that she found it so impossible to believe. As for Reine, she sat quite still with her head turned away; she did not move until the door opened, and Dick came in, stooping under the low archway. He was just as usual; they might have been in Mrs. Butler's drawing-room in Eaton Square, Catherine thought, as he shook hands first with one and then with another.

'Did you not know I was coming to Tracy?' he said to Catherine, as he sat down. 'I found nobody there and no preparations, but they told me you were here, and so I got Pélottier to give me a lift. I knew Mademoiselle Reine would kindly take me back,' he added, turning to Reine. She had looked up at last and seemed trying to speak indifferently, but her two cheeks were burning.

'You know we are going back in a cart,' she said with some harshness. 'It is, perhaps, a different conveyance from any you are used to.'

'Do you think I am likely to have been dazzled by the splendour of Pélottier's gig?' Dick asked, smiling.

Reine did not like being laughed at. 'You used to object to many things,' she said vexed, and then melting. 'Such as they are, you know you are welcome to any of ours.'

'Am I?' Dick answered, looking kindly at her.

Catherine envied Reine at that instant. She had nothing, not even a flower of her own, to offer Dick, except, indeed, she thought, with a little smile, that great bouquet out of poor Monsieur Fontaine's garden.

If it was a sort of *Miserere* before, what a triumphal service was not the little evening prayer to Catherine! They went into the chapel after dinner for a minute or two. Sitting there in the darkness, she thought, silly child, that heaven itself would not seem more beautiful with all the radiance of the crystal seas and rolling suns than did this little shrine. To her as to Petitpère the Delivrande was a little heaven just now, but for Petitpère, Dick's presence or absence added but little to its splendour. There was Dick, meanwhile, a shadowy living figure in the dimness. Catherine could see him from where she sat by Reine. How happy she was! In all this visionary love of hers, only once had she thought of herself—that day when she sat by the well—at other times she had only thought of Dick, and poured out all the treasure in her kind heart before him. That he should prize it she never expected:

that he should return it had never once crossed her mind. All her longing was to see him and hear of him, and some day, perhaps, to do him some service, to be a help, to manifest her love in secret alms of self-devotion and fidelity and charity. She looked up at the string of silver hearts; no longer did they seem to her emblems of sad hearts hung up in bitterness, but tokens of gladness placed there before the shrine.

Petitpère was driving, and proposed to go back another way. The others sat face to face as they had come. The afternoon turned grey and a little chilly. Reine took Josette on her knee: Catherine wrapped Toto in her shawl. Dick had asked Catherine all the questions people ask by this time. He didn't see her doubtful face when he told her he had not waited for an answer to the letter announcing his coming.

'Madame de Tracy isn't like you, Mademoiselle Chrétien,' said Dick. 'She doesn't snub people when they ask for hospitality.'

It struck Catherine a little oddly, afterwards, that Dick should speak to Reine in this reproachful tone, that Reine should answer so shortly and yet so softly, so that one could hardly have told whether she was pleased or angry —at the time she only thought that he was there. Yesterday she had longed for a sight of the lines his pen had scratched upon a paper, to-day she was sitting opposite to him with no one to say one word. Petitpère's

short cut was longer than it should have been, but Catherine would have gone on for ever if she had held the reins. All the grey sky encompassed them—all the fields spread into the dusk—the soft fresh winds came from a distance. The pale yellow shield of the horizon was turning to silver. The warm lights were coming out in the cottage lattices. As the evening closed in, they were sprinkled like glow-worms here and there in the country. Sometimes the cart passed under trees arching black against the pale sky; once they crossed a bridge with a rush of water below. There was not much colour anywhere, nor form in the twilight, but exquisite tone and sentiment every-where.

They passed one or two groups strolling and sitting out in the twilight as they approached Petitport, and the rushing of the sea seemed coming up to meet them at times. They were all very silent. Petitpère had been humming a little tune to himself for the last half-hour; Dick had spoken to Reine once or twice, always in that bantering tone; to Catherine he was charming, gay, and kind and courteous, and like himself in short.

'Are you going to stay here, Mr. Butler?' asked Catherine once, suddenly.

'Only a day or two,' Dick said abruptly. 'I must go back for Beamish's wedding. I came because—because I could not keep away any longer, Miss George. Here we are at the château.'

'There is M. le Maire,' cried Petitpère, pulling up abruptly.

Fontaine had come down to look for Toto, who was asleep and very tired. The *turban écossais* slid off the little nodding head as Dick hauled the child to his father over the side of the cart.

'Good-night, Reine, and thank you,' Catherine said. 'It has been—oh, such a happy day!'

Fontaine only waited to assist Miss George to jump down, to express his surprise and delight at Mr. Butler's return, and then hurried off with his little sleepy Toto. 'I shall come back in the evening,' cried the maire, going off and waving his hat.

'Monsieur Richard, you also get down here,' said Petitpère, growing impatient at the horse's head, for Dick delayed and stood talking to Reine.

The two had been alone with Josette in the cart for a minute. Now Richard took Reine's unwilling hand in his, and looked her fixedly in the face, but he only said, 'Au revoir, Mademoiselle Reine; is it not so?'

Reine seemed to hesitate. 'Au revoir,' she faltered at last, in the pathetic voice, and she looked away.

Catherine was safely landed down below and heard nothing. 'He came because he could not help it,' she was saying to herself over and over again. For the first time a wild wondering thrill of hope came into her head. It was a certainty while it lasted—she never afterwards

forgot that minute. She stood outside the iron gate, the moon was rising palely, the evening seemed to thrill with a sudden tremor, the earth shook under her feet. While it lasted the certainty was complete, the moment was perfect. How many such are there even in the most prosperous lives? This one minute lasted until the cart drove away.

As Catherine and Dick were walking slowly across the court together he stopped short. 'I know I can trust you, Miss George,' he said. 'I—I think you must have guessed how things are with me,' and a bright look came into his face. 'Pray do not say anything here. Reine is a thousand times too good for me,' he said with a shake in his voice, 'or for them, and they wouldn't understand; and I can't afford to marry yet, but I know I shall win her in time. Dear Miss George, I know you will keep my secret. We have always been friends, have we not?' and he held out his hand.

Friends! If love is the faith, then friendship is the charity of life.

Catherine said, 'Yes,' very softly, very gently, and put her hand into his, and then, trembling a little, went away into the house. 'Yes,' Catherine had said, in a dreamy sort of a way, as if she was thinking of something else. There was no bitterness in her heart, no pang of vanity wounded just then; only an inexpressible sadness had succeeded that instant of foolish mad certainty. The real

depth, and truth, and sweetness of her nature seemed stirred and brought to light by the blow which had shattered the frail fabric she had erected for herself. But when she went upstairs into her room, the first thing she saw was the great nosegay of marguerites which the children had placed upon her table, and then she began to cry. . .

She was quite calm when she came downstairs to dinner. Dick tried to speak to her again, but he was somehow enveloped by Madame de Tracy, who was all the more glad to see him because she had written to him not to come.

After dinner they all began to dance again as they had done the night before, and Marthe went to the piano and began to play for them. Ernestine would have liked, if possible, that all the gentlemen should have danced with her, but that could not be; so she was content to let the two little demoiselles de Vernon share in the amusements. Dick came and asked Miss George to dance, but she shook her head and said she was tired. The little ball lasted some ten minutes perhaps, and ended as suddenly as it had begun. Marthe closed the piano with a sigh: she had very brilliant and supple fingers, and played with grace and sentiment; it was a sort of farewell to which they had all been dancing. Ernestine put one hand into her husband's arm, and one into Dick's. 'Come,' she said, dragging them out through the open window.

'Jeunesse! jeunesse!' said the countess kindly to

Catherine as the young people went scampering and flitting across the grass and disappeared in the winding walks of the garden. Catherine answered with a faint smile. Madame de Tracy took up the newspaper and drew her chair to the lamp, and then it was that Catherine slid quietly out of the room and crept along the front of the house, and suddenly began flying down the avenue to the straight terrace walk, from whence she could see the sea gleaming silver under the vast purple black dome of night. It was full moon again. All the light rippled over the country. The old pots on the parapet were turned to silver. The trees shivered and seemed to shake the moonlight from their twigs and branches. Once the far-away voices reached her through the silence; but poor little Catherine only shrank when she heard them. She felt so utterly forsaken and out of tune and harmony in this vast harmony, that she found herself clinging to the old pot with the lichen creeping up the outer edge, and crying and crying as if her heart must break. Poor little moonstruck creature, shedding her silver tears in the moonlight; she was like a little lichen herself, with her soft hands grasping the cold stone and crying over them and asking them for sympathy. She shivered, but she did not heed the chill; she seemed engulfed as it were in the great bitter sea of passionate regret and shame, struggling and struggling with no one to help. The moon travelled on, and now came streaming full upon the terrace, changing

everything fantastically. The gleam of the lamp by which Madame de Tracy was reading pierced through the trees. Sometimes a bird stirred in its sleep; sometimes a dog barked in the valley.

The voices which had sounded so distant, presently came nearer and nearer: shadows, figures, sudden bursts of laughter, the shrill exclamations, the deeper tones of the men. Catherine looking up, saw them all at the end of the walk: she could not face them; she started and fled. The others saw the white figure flitting before them.

'It is a ghost!' some one cried.

'It is Miss George,' said Dick.

Catherine had no thought but to avoid them all just then as she went flying along, only as she was turning up the dark pathway leading to the house a figure suddenly emerged into the moonlight. This was no ghost either. It was only Fontaine, with his eyeglasses gleaming in the moon rays. But she started and looked back, thinking in vague despair where she should go to escape. Fontaine seemed to guess her thought:—

'Will you not remain one instant with me, mademoiselle?' he said. 'I was looking for you. Madame de Tracy told me I might find you here.'

He spoke oddly. There was a tone in his voice she had never heard before. What had come to him? Suddenly she heard him speaking again, thoroughly in earnest; and when people are in earnest, their words come strongly

and simply. All his affectations had left him, his voice sounded almost angry and fierce.

'I know that to you we country-folks seem simple and perhaps ridiculous at times,' he said. 'Perhaps you compare us with others, and to our disadvantage. But the day might come when you would not regret having accepted the protection and the name of an honest man,' cried Fontaine. 'Madame de Tracy has told me of your circumstances—your sisters. You know me, and you know my son. The affection of a child, the devotion of a lifetime, count for something, do they not? And this at least I offer you,' said Fontaine, 'in all good faith and sincerity. You have no mother to whom I can address myself, and I come to you, mademoiselle; and I think you owe me an answer.'

There was a moment's silence; a little wind came rustling through the trees, bringing with it a sound of distant voices and laughter. Catherine began to tremble again: it all sounded so sad and so desolate. She found herself touched and surprised and frightened all at once by Fontaine's vehemence. In an hour of weakness he had found her. 'Take it, take it,' some voice seemed saying to her; 'give friendship, since love is not for you!' It seemed like a strange unbelievable dream to be there, making up her mind, while the young people, laughing still and talking, were coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly Fontaine saw a pale wistful face in the moon-

light, two hands put up helplessly. 'Take me away, oh, take me away!' she said, with a sudden appealing movement. 'I can do nothing for you in return, not even love you.'

'Ah! do not say that, my child,' said Fontaine. 'Do not be afraid, all will be well.'

A minute later Catherine found herself standing with Fontaine before Madame de Tracy, who looked up from her newspaper with a kind puzzled face. 'She consents,' said Fontaine; 'you were wrong, madame. How shall I ever thank you for making me know her?'

It was Dick who first told Reine the news of the engagement. 'I don't half like her to marry that fellow, poor little thing,' he said. Reine, who was churning—she always made a point of working harder when Dick was present than at any other time—looked at him over her barrel. 'I should not have done it in her place,' she said, 'but then we are different.' Dick thought her less kind at that minute than he had ever known her before.

Love is the faith, and friendship should be the charity of life, and yet Reine in her own happiness could scarcely forgive Catherine for what she had done. Guessing and fearing what she did, she judged her as she would have judged herself. She forgot that she was a strong woman, and Catherine a child still in many things, and lonely and unhappy, while Reine was a happy woman now, at last,

for the first time. For her pride had given way, and the struggle was over. Reine, who would not come unwelcome into any family, who still less would consent to a secret engagement, had succumbed suddenly and entirely when she saw Dick standing before her again. She had not answered his letter telling her that he would come and see her once more. She had vowed that she would never think of him again. When he had gone away the first time without speaking, she had protested in her heart; but when he spoke to her at last, the protest died away on her lips, and in her heart too. And so it came about that these two were standing on either side of the churn, talking over their own hopes and future, and poor little Catherine's too. With all her hardness—it came partly from a sort of vague remorse—Reine's heart melted with pity when she thought of her friend, and instinctively guessed at her story.

'Why do you ask me so many questions about Miss George?' Dick said at last. 'Poor child, she deserves a better fate.'

CHAPTER XII.

PLASTIC CIRCUMSTANCE.

No two windows look one way
O'er the small seawater-thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day!
I passing, saw you overhead!
R. BROWNING.

ONCE long afterwards, Catherine, speaking of the time before her marriage, said to Reine,—'Ah! Reine, you cannot imagine what it is to have been afraid, as I have been. I am ashamed, when I think of my cowardice and want of trust; and yet I do not know that if the time were to come again, I might not be as weak, in my foolish, wicked longing for a fancied security.'

'I don't know whether strong people are more or less to be pitied than weak ones, when they are in perplexity,' Reine answered, brusquely. 'You are much mistaken if you think I have never been afraid. I tell you, there have been days when I have been afraid of jumping over the cliff into the sea, like the swine in the Scriptures, to escape from the torments of the condemned. But we take things more at our ease now,' said Reine, with a sigh.

'One would soon die of it, if one was always to be young. And yet, for the matter of that,' she added, glancing kindly at Catherine, 'you look to me very much as you did when I knew you first.' And as she spoke, Reine, whose hand had not forgotten its cunning, sent a shuttle swiftly whirling, and caught it deftly, while Josette, who had grown up tall and pretty, stood by, scissors in hand, cutting the string into lengths.

But this was long years afterwards, when Catherine looked back, as at a dream, to the vague and strange and unreal time which had preceded her marriage. There had been a quick confusion, a hurry, a coming and going; it seemed to her like a kaleidoscope turning and blending the old accustomed colours and forms of life into new combinations and patterns. Catherine had watched it all with a bewildered indifference. She had taken the step, she was starting on the journey through the maze of the labyrinth, she had not the heart to go back. There had been long talks, and explanations which never explained, and indecisions that all tended one way, and decided her fate as certainly as the strongest resolves. Once she had been on the very point of breaking everything off; and, looking back, she seemed to see herself again; by the seaside, watching the waves and telling them that they should determine; or *tête-à-tête* with Fontaine, silent and embarrassed, trying to make him understand how little she had to give him in return for all his attentive devotion.

He would not, perhaps he could not, understand her feeling for him. Why was she troubling herself? He looked conscious, elated, perfectly satisfied; for Fontaine, like a wise man, regarded the outside aspect of things, and did not disturb himself concerning their secret and more difficult complications. She had promised to be his wife. She was a charming person, he required no more; he had even declared that for the present he would not touch a single farthing of the small yearly sum which belonged to her. It was to be expended as heretofore upon the education of her sisters. In the holidays they were to find a home in the châlet. Fontaine felt that he was behaving liberally and handsomely, and it added to his satisfaction. Madame Mérard groaned in agony over her snuff-box at his infatuation. That her son-in-law should marry again, she had always expected. 'But never, never, Monsieur Mérard, did I think him capable of a folly like this!' cried the old lady. Monsieur Mérard, who was an extremely fat and good-humoured old gentleman, tried to look as if the matter was not perfectly indifferent to him. There were but three things in life that really mattered; all the rest must be taken as it came; this was his experience:—

I. Your coffee should be hot in the morning.

II. You should have at least five trumps between you and your partner.

III. Your washerwoman should not be allowed to starch your shirt-collars into uncomfortable ridges.

That very day she had sent them home in this horrible condition. Monsieur Mérard could not turn his head without suffering. That Fontaine should marry more or less to please Madame Mérard seemed a trifle in such an emergency.

Dick was the only person who doubted the expediency of the proposed arrangement, or at least who said as much to Catherine herself. He found a moment to speak to her alone in the hall.

'Forgive me,' he said; 'I know I of all people have the least right to speak; but have you thought well over the tremendous importance of the step you are taking? You are young enough to look for something different from . . . If you wanted a home, Reine is always there. . . . Fontaine is an excellent fellow; but your tastes are so unlike; your whole education and way of thinking.' . . .

'You don't know what it is,' said Catherine, controlling herself and speaking very gently; 'I shall have a home and some one to look to;' but her heart sank as she spoke.

Butler himself was one of those weak-minded natures that sometimes trouble themselves about other concerns besides their own and those of their own belongings. The stalwart hero who succeeds in life, loves his wife and his children, or the object of his affections, his friends, his dog, but worries himself no farther about the difficulties and sorrows, expressed and unexpressed, by which he is

surrounded. He does his day's work, exchanges good-humoured greetings with the passers-by, but he lets them pass on. He would never, for instance, dream of being sorry for a lonely, fanciful, little woman who chanced to cross his path. He might throw her a sovereign if she were starving, and shut the door, but that would be the extent of his sympathy. The Mr. Grundys of life are sensible, manly fellows, business-like, matter-of-fact, and they would very reasonably condemn the foolish vagaries and compunctions of unpractical visionaries like Dick. And they are safer companions perhaps than others of finer nerve and more sympathetic fibre. Catherine might have been heart-whole and laughing still with the children in the garden, if Dick Butler had belonged to the tribe of Mr. Grundys. Unluckily for her he was gentle and kind-hearted, and chivalrous after a fashion. He could not help being touched by helplessness and simplicity. He had said nothing to Catherine more than he had said to any of the young ladies of his acquaintance, but the mere fact of her dependence and inequality—although he would not own it—gave importance to what had no importance. It would have been truer kindness to have left her alone. It is no longer the business of knights-errant to go about rescuing damsels in distress.

And yet Dick had the gift, which does not belong to all men: a gift of sympathy and an intuitive tenderness. 'What chance of happiness was there for that impression-

able little creature with the well-meaning but tiresome Fontaine?' So he said to himself and to his aunt one day; but Madame de Tracy only assured him that he was mistaken in his estimate of Fontaine. It was a charming arrangement, and Catherine was perfectly happy.

Catherine's perfect happiness manifested itself by a strange restlessness; she scarcely ate, her dreams were troubled, music would make her eyes fill up with tears. '*Voi che sapete*,' some one was singing one evening; she could not bear it, and jumped up and went out through the open window into the night. She did not go very far, and stood looking in at them all, feeling like a little stray sprite out of the woods, peering in at the happy united company assembled in the great saloon.

Madame de Tracy was surprised and somewhat disappointed at the silence and calmness with which Catherine accepted her new lot in life. She took the girl up into her room that night, and talked to her for nearly an hour, congratulated, recapitulated, embraced her affectionately, and then sat holding her hand between her own fat white fingers; but it was all in vain. Her heroine would not perform; the little thing had no confidence to give in return; she seemed suddenly to have frozen up; still, chill, pale, answering only by monosyllables, silent and impenetrable. Catherine seemed transformed into somebody else. She was not ungrateful for the elder lady's kindness, but her eyes looked with a beseeching fawn-like

glance which seemed to say, 'Only leave me, only let me be.' This was not in the least amusing or interesting to Madame de Tracy. To Catherine it was a sort of slow torture. Dazed and a little stupefied, and longing for silence, to be expected to talk sentiment when she felt none, to blush, to laugh consciously, to listen to all the countess's raptures and exclamations, was weary work. The child did her best, tried to speak, but the words died away on her lips; tried to say she was happy, but then a sudden pain in her heart seemed to rise and choke her. What was she doing? Dick disapproved. Was it too late to undo the work she had begun.

Fontaine did not come up to the château that evening. It was perhaps fortunate for him that he was detained by Madame Mérard. Catherine thought not of the countess's congratulations, but of Dick's two words of warning that night, as she was sitting upon her bed half undressed, with all her hair tumbling about her. She could hear them all dispersing below, and Dick's voice humming '*Voi che sapete*,' as he tramped along the gallery; then a door banged, and all was silent.

She was thinking of his words again in the courtyard next morning, sitting with her work upon a bench under a tree. The De Vernons, and Ernestine, and Dick were at the piano in the little boudoir, of which the windows were open. Little Henri was marching in and out, and beating time with his whip. The young people were singing and

screaming with laughter, and banging false notes on the piano sometimes, and laughing again. 'Take care, Henri, do not get out of the window,' cried his mother from within; but Henri paid no attention. The gay jangle went on, and the laughter and music poured out to where Catherine was sitting, with her chin resting on her two folded hands. She could see through the iron gates; beyond the road lay a distance smiling in sunshine. She watched the smoke from a chimney drifting in the breeze. 'Clang a rang, clang a rang, Ta ra, ta ta ra,' sang the young people; and then came a burst of laughter, and then more voices joined in. Catherine recognised Dick's in the medley of sounds. The sun shone hotter and hotter; a chestnut fell to the ground with a sudden snap, and the brown bright fruit showed through the green pod. Again the music sounded and her ribbon fluttered gently. How happy they all seemed! What good spirits Butler was in! The languid young Englishman seemed to have caught something of the life and gaiety of the people among whom he was staying. But he had looked grave when he spoke to her, Catherine thought. How good of him to think of her! Just then he came out and quickly crossed the yard without seeing her. 'Do not be late,' cried Ernestine from the window.

Dick nodded, and strode away along the dusty road towards the village. Catherine watched him from under her tree until he disappeared, and Henri and Nanine came

up disposed for conversation, and bringing a supply of chestnuts for Miss George's work-basket.

'*Mon cousin* is very disagreeable,' Henri said. 'He would not take me with him. I don't care for him any more.'

'Mademoiselle, what stuff is this?' said Nanine, taking hold of Catherine's gown. 'Something English, is it not? Have you many more toilettes in your box upstairs? Though to be sure,' added the child, with instinctive politeness, 'one does not require much when one is travelling, and you did not expect to remain with us long.'

'I brought all the prettiest dresses I had, Nanine,' Catherine said, sadly, wondering how much the children knew already. 'Why do you think I am not going to stay with you?'

Nanine turned red and did not answer; but Henri cried out, 'Oh ho! Mademoiselle la Curieuse. Miss George has found you out. Miss George, she heard mamma say there was no room for you at Paris the day grandmamma was angry, and mamma had her migraine. It is not pretty to listen, is it?' said Henri, who had not forgiven certain sisterly lectures.

Miss George blushed too, like Nanine, and did not answer. She began slowly throwing the chestnuts one by one into the basket at her side, and then suddenly started up. All the chestnuts which had remained in her lap fell to the ground and rolled away. She left the amazed chil-

dren to collect their scattered treasures. It was a nothing that the children had inadvertently revealed to her, and yet in her excited state it seemed the last drop in her cup. 'What did it all mean?' she said to herself. 'Who can I trust? where can I go? Only Mr. Butler and Reine speak the truth to me. Ah! would Reine help me if I went to her? I think—I think she cares for me a little.'

Meanwhile Dick, who had not gone to the village after all, was walking along the cliff to the farm. He found Reine sitting in the window of the kitchen, with her head resting upon her hand, as perplexed as Catherine herself, only facing her troubles and looking to no one else for help. What was she afraid of? She scarcely knew. She was afraid for Dick far more than for herself.

Who can account for painful impressions? Reine's was a strong and healthy organisation, and of all people she would have seemed the least likely to be subject to vague terrors, to alarms indefinite and without a cause; and yet there were moments of foreboding and depression, against which she found it almost impossible to struggle; almost, I say, because therein did her healthy and strengthful nature reassert itself, battling with these invisible foes, and resisting them valiantly.

She, too, sometimes asked herself whether she had

done wisely and well? Whether she, a simple country girl, without experience of the world, would ever be able to suffice to a grand seigneur like Dick? Once she had thought herself more than his equal, but that was over now. She was rich and he was poor, he told her; but it was a magnificent sort of poverty, and the word had not the same meaning for him as it had for old Nanon, for example, mumbling her crusts.

'Ah, was he, could he be in earnest?' Reine asked herself. Dick's languid manner might have been that of any young Machiavel of society; it frightened her sometimes, though she laughed at it to him; but his heart was a simple blundering machine, full of kindness and softness. There was a real touch of genius about him for all his crude workmanship. Whatever people may say, genius is gentle and full of tenderness. It is cleverness which belongs perhaps to the children of this world. Some very dull and sad people have genius, though the world may not count it as such: a genius for love, or for patience, or for prayer, may be. We know the divine spark is here and there in this world: who shall say under what manifestation or humble disguise?

Reine was not troubling herself about such speculations, but she trembled sometimes for Dick, even more than for herself, and asked herself whether he might not do himself injury by marrying her? And so she told

him when he came in now, and took her hand and kissed it, and asked what she was thinking of, and why she looked so disturbed.

Her answer did not quite please him somehow, though as she spoke she looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her, blushing, with tender deep eyes, as she sat in the light of the window. 'Why do you always want to take care of me?' said Butler. 'Am I not big enough to take care of myself? Reine, when we are married I shall take care of you too. I shall not let you work any more, and I shall paint you just as you look now, and not one of the fine ladies will be able to hold a candle to you.'

'They will despise me,' said Reine, 'as they did my mother; perhaps for your sake they will just touch me with the end of their fans. You know well enough that it is from no want of love for you that I speak,' said Reine, blushing more deeply. 'I love you so well that I had rather you left me here now this moment than that you were ever ashamed of me or sorry for what you have done,' and suddenly Reine the overbearing, Reine the magnificent, burst into tears.

Dick tried to reassure her, to console her, by every tender word he could think of; but Reine, recovering, and ashamed of her weakness, pushed him away. 'Go, go,' she said, as he bent over her, full of concern and gentleness. He was a little hurt; he loved her, but he could not always understand her—her odd abruptness and inde-

pendence—her strange moods. He turned away—how well he remembered the scene in after years! The quaint, straggling room, with its odd, picturesque accessories, even the flower-pot in the window, and the faint scent from its blossoms; Reine's noble head bent low and the light upon it. He turned away, and as he did so he caught sight for one instant of a pale face looking in through the window —a pale, wistful sad face, that disappeared in a moment. Poor sad eyes! the sight of the two together was more than they could bear. Human nature is very weak as well as very strong. Catherine had come across the sultry fields, looking to the farm for help and consolation. If Reine also advised it, she thought she would break for ever with the schemes she had consented to; go back, work hard, and struggle on as best she could. Dear Reine! she at least could be depended upon. Coming to the farm at last, she had found only Paris to welcome her with a lazy wag of his tail. There was no one about, all the doors were shut; even the house door with its bars and heavy-headed nails all distinct in the sun. She tapped once or twice without being heard. She turned away at last, disappointed, thinking Reine must be out in the fields; and then as she turned she glanced in through the window and saw the two. Catherine could think of them together with certain gentle loving sympathy: but to come knocking at the door wanting help, and not be heard; to stand by unnoticed, and see them engrossed, utterly oblivious of her

existence—oh, it was hard, life was cruel, friendship was an illusion!

'Can anything be the matter?' Dick said, starting up. 'That was little Miss George.' And he went to the door and looked out. He was only in time to see the little figure disappearing under the archway.

Reine wiped her tears out of her eyes—I don't know that she was the less sad for that—she came to the doorway and stood beside him. 'Poor child,' she said; 'was she looking in?'

'She looked very strange,' said Richard. 'It may have been my fancy——' And then catching Reine's steady gaze he turned red in his turn. 'Don't look like that, dear,' said he, trying to laugh, 'or I shall think it was a ghost I saw.'

A ghost indeed! the ghost of a dead love. Only yesterday some one was saying, with a sigh,—'There are other deaths sadder than death itself: friendships die and people live on, and love dies, too, and that is the saddest of all.' The saddest of all! and sometimes people come and look in through windows and see it.

Petitpère came in a minute after, and found Reine and Richard still standing in the doorway. 'What have you been doing to the little demoiselle Anglaise?' said he. 'She passed close by the barn just now without speaking to me, and I think she was crying.'

Catherine meanwhile was going quickly away from the

place, leaving them 'together in their happiness,' so she kept telling herself. She hurried along the dusty road; she did not go back to the house, but she took a footway leading to the cliff, and she came to the edge at last and looked over. The small sandy convolvuluses were creeping at her feet, the wind shook the dry faint-coloured scentless flowers. The wavelets were rolling in, and the light struck and made fire upon each flashing crest. She clambered down the side of the cliff by a narrow little pathway which the fishermen had made there, and she came down upon the beach at last, and went stumbling over the shingle and seaweed and heaps of sea-drift.

Catherine had gone stumbling along under the shadow of the cliff. She did not care or think where she was going. She had come upon the smooth, rippled sands: the sea was swelling inland in a great rushing curve. She had passed the village; she heard the sounds of life overhead as she went by; she had come to the terrace at the end of Fontaine's garden. A little river of sea-water was running in a cleft in the sand. Catherine had to jump to cross it. Ever afterwards she remembered the weary effort it was to her to spring. But she crossed the little ford, and came safely to the other side; and it was at this instant that somebody, rushing up, came and clasped her knees with many expressions of delight. It was Toto, who in his little childish squeak gladly exclaimed: 'I saw you from the cabane. Papa sent me, and I ran.' The

child was clinging to her still when Fontaine himself made his appearance, slippered, and newspaper in hand, hastening to welcome her.

'Were you coming to find us, chère demoiselle?' said he. 'Come, you are at home, you know.'

Was she indeed at home? Catherine felt as if she had been crazy for a few minutes with doubt, mistrust, indecision. She hated herself, and felt herself unworthy of Fontaine's kindness, and yet she was inexpressibly touched and cheered by it. She said to herself that she had found a friend in her sore necessity—that she should never, never forget his kindness, and indeed she kept her vow. This was the last of her indecisions.

A little later Fontaine walked back to the château with her. As they were going along she asked him if he knew that they had meant to send her away when they left for Paris?

'Chère demoiselle,' said he, 'how should I know it? It may or may not be true. I care not, since you remain.'

'I felt as if nobody wanted me,' Catherine said, as they went in at the gate together.

Butler was alone on the terrace, smoking a cigar, when they came back. When he saw them he got up and came to meet them. He looked a little curious, a little languid, and slightly sentimental.

'Why did you go away?' he said. 'I rushed out to

call you, Miss George, but you would have nothing to do with us.'

'I—I did not want to stop just then,' she said, hastily. He had recognised her then! She turned to Fontaine in a confused sort of way, and called him to her.

'Charles,' she said, calling him by his Christian name for the first time. 'Have you? . . Will you? . .' The words died away. But after that first moment she was quite outwardly calm again. Butler had recognised her. She made a great effort. She spoke quietly and indifferently, while to herself she said passionately, that at least he could not read her heart. She had taken her resolution, she would abide by it.

Reine, in her place, would have done differently. Catherine was doing wrong, perhaps, but with no evil intent—she was false with a single heart. She thought there was no other solution to her small perplexities than this desperate one she had taken. If she had been older she would have been wiser. Wait. That is the answer to most sorrows, to most troubled consciences. But how can one believe in this when one has not waited for anything? Some one says, very wisely and touchingly: 'To the old, sorrow is sorrow; to the young, sorrow is despair.' What other interpretation may there not be hidden beneath the dark veil to those who can see from afar?

CHAPTER XIII.

MENDELSSOHN'S WEDDING-MARCH.

Some fragment for his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly learned art,
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral.

CATHERINE BUTLER was to have been married on the 9th, but old Mr. Beamish was suddenly taken ill, and everything had to be put off indefinitely. Dick offered himself to remain at Tracy until after Catherine George's wedding.

This wedding was fixed for a very early date. Madame de Tracy was anxious to have it over before she left for Paris. Lady Farebrother, who was written to, sent back her consent in a strange jumble of religion and worldliness. Mrs. Buckington, to everybody's surprise, came out with a fifty-pound note for Catherine's trousseau. The modest little outfit did not take long to make ready. Fontaine undertook the other necessary arrangements at Caen, for from the difference of religion there were some slight complications beyond those which usually attend weddings.

The day came very quickly, almost unexpectedly and suddenly at last, like most eventful days.

The Protestant church is a great, gay, vault-like place, with many columns and sad-coloured walls. Catherine, who had slept at Caen the night before in a house belonging to the De Vernons, came driving up to the door with Madame de Tracy just as the party arrived from Petitport by the early train. They all passed in together, but Catherine felt a chill as she came into the sombre place. It was so big, so full of echoes; some one brushed against a chair as the little procession passed up the centre aisle: the dismal scraping sound reverberated from column to column. The clergyman was a kind-looking, white-haired old man, who read the service in a plaintive, mumbling voice. He was only passing through the place, he knew none of the people, but he was interested in the little sweet-eyed bride, and long afterwards he remembered her when he met her again. Fontaine was uncomfortable, and very glad when this part of the ceremony was over. There was no knowing where these mysterious rites to which he was exposed, defenceless and without redress, might not lead him. He was not anxious for Catherine. She was inured to it, and she was so docile and gentle, too, that nothing would be counted very heavily against her; but for a good Catholic like himself, who knew better, who had been carefully instructed, there was no saying what dangers he might not be incurring.

The service was soon over, but Madame de Tracy had made some mistake in her orders, and when the wedding-party came out into the peristyle of the church, the carriages had both disappeared. It was but a short way to the church where they were going. Most of them had intended to walk, and there was now no other alternative. 'Venez, madame,' said Jean de Tracy, offering Catherine his arm, while Fontaine followed with Madame de Tracy; then came Marthe, with some children; and last of all, Dick and a strange lady, who had also arrived from Petit-port by the early train. It was not Madame Mérard. She, naturally enough, refused to be present at the ceremony; Madame Ernestine, too, found it quite out of the question to be up at such an impossible hour. The strange lady was handsomely dressed in a grey silk gown and a pale-coloured Cashmere shawl. She kept a little apart from the rest, never lifting her eyes off her book during the service. Madame de Tracy could not imagine who she was at first, but Catherine's eyes brightened when she saw her.

The strange lady looked a little ashamed and shy and fierce at once. She had fancied people stared at her as she came along; and no wonder, for a more beautiful and noble-looking young creature than Reine Chrétien at that time never existed. Under her bonnet her eyes looked bigger and brighter, and her rippled hair was no longer hidden under the starch of her cap; she came up with a

certain grace and stately swing which she had caught from her mother. Secretly, she felt uncomfortable in her long-trained gown; but she came bravely along, as if she had been used to her draperies all her life. Dick was amused and interested to see his peasant maiden so transformed.

'Reine, I never should have dared to fall in love with you if I had first known you like this,' said he, watching his opportunity, and taking his place beside her.

'Don't laugh at me,' said Reine.

'What a dismal affair this has been. I know my aunt has cooked the whole thing up,' Dick went on. 'They are not in the least suited to each other.

Reine sighed. 'Ill-assorted marriages never answer,' she said, in the quick harsh tones she sometimes used.

'But well-assorted marriages, mademoiselle,' said Dick, gaily and kindly, and then he stopped short. A sad glance had crossed his; Catherine looked back with her pale face, and the young man, who always said out what was in his mind, began pitying her to his companion.

Reine, never very talkative, became quite silent by degrees.

Some bells were ringing from some of the steeples, and to Catherine they seemed playing one of the bars of Mendelssohn's wedding march over and over again. They were passing by some of those old wooden houses which still exist in the quaint old city, piled with carvings and balconies and flowers, chiefly balsams, flaming against the

blackened walls; heads were peeping through the windows, casements were gleaming. It was like the realisation of a fancy Catherine once had long ago, when she was listening to Beamish in the studio.

'How loudly those bells are ringing. They will break their necks,' said Jean de Tracy, by way of something to say, for conversation was a little difficult, under the circumstances, and silence was difficult too.

All round the church of St. Pierre there is a flower-garden. The church stands at the end of the quai, and at the meeting of many streets. The market-people were in groups all about when the wedding-party arrived. There seemed to be an unusual stir in the place. It is always gay and alive; to-day it was more than usually crowded with white caps, and flowers, and blouses, and baskets of vegetables. Jean de Tracy, who was used to the place, led the way across to a side-door, which he opened and held back for Catherine to pass in, but she waited until the others came up. Fontaine and Madame de Tracy first entered, the others following after, and then there was a sudden stop, and no one advanced any farther. If the Protestant temple seemed melancholy, this was terrible to them as they came in; out of the cheerful clatter and sunshine, into a gloom and darkness which startled them all. The high altar was hung completely in black; the lights burnt dimly: by degrees, when they could distinguish more clearly, they saw that figures in

mourning were passing up the long aisle, while voices at the altar were chaunting a requiem for the dead. Catherine gave a litle cry, and seized hold of some one who was standing near her.

'Ah! how terrible!' cried Madame de Tracy, involuntarily.

'There must be some mistake,' said Dick. 'Have we come to the wrong church?'

'It often happens so in our churches,' Reine said, quietly taking Catherine's hand. 'I do not think there is any mistake.'

Fontaine and Jean de Tracy went hastily forward to speak to an official who was advancing up a side aisle. As Reine said, there was no mistake, they were expected; a little side-altar had been made ready for them, where l'Abbé Verdier's well-known face somewhat reassured them, but not entirely. We all know that the marriage service goes on though there are mourners in the world. Why not face the truth? and yet it was sad and very depressing. The ceremony was hurried through, but Catherine was sobbing long before it came to an end. Marthe was the person who was least moved. It put her in mind of her own profession, now soon approaching, when neither marriage nor burial service, but something between the two, would be read over her. Reine was trying to cheer and reassure the children. Toto said he wanted to go, he

was frightened, and began to whimper, and at last Reine took him out into the porch.

Butler, who always seemed to know where she was, followed her a minute after, and stood with her under the noble old porch with its ornamentations and gurgoyles carved against the blue of the sky: stony saints and flowers, fantastic patterns, wreaths, birds flying, arch built upon arch, delightful bounty and intricate loveliness, toned and tinted by the years which had passed since these noble gates were put up to the house of the Lord, and the towers overhead were piled. Dick thought he should be well content to stand there with Reine like the abbots and saints all about, and see the centuries go by, and the great tides of the generations of people.

Reine was busy meanwhile, answering Toto's impatient little questions; her shawl was half slipping off, as she leant against a niche in the wall: with one hand (it was a trick she had) she was shading her eyes from the sun, with the other she was holding Toto's little stout fist.

'I am trying to give you a name,' said Dick at last, smiling. 'I do not know what noble lady was martyred in Cashmere, for whom you might stand, in your niche, just as you are.'

As he spoke, some more of the mourners passed in. It was the funeral of a high dignitary in the place, and numbers of people were attending it. 'What a sad

wedding for poor Catherine!' Reine said, looking after them.

'Poor little thing! It must be almost over now,' Dick answered.

'I shall not be sorry for one if it were, only to get rid of all this,' said Reine, tugging at her great Indian shawl; 'and to go back to Petitport quietly in my own everyday clothes.'

'I think after all I like you best in your cap and apron,' said Butler, looking at her critically.

'I knew it, I knew it!' Reine cried, suddenly flashing up; 'I am not used or fit for anything else but what I am accustomed to. I often feel if I ever put off my poor peasant dress it may turn out an evil day for you and for me. You might change and be ashamed of me perhaps, and . . . .'

'Hush, Reine,' said Butler: 'it isn't worthy of you to have so little trust in me. Why wouldn't you believe me the other day, as now, when I tell you . . . ?'

'Shall I tell you what makes me mistrust you?' the girl answered, and her eyes seemed to dilate, and then she suddenly broke off and went on angrily: 'Ah, I am no angel from heaven; I have told you that often enough. We in our class are not like you others. We don't pretend to take things as they come, and to care, as you do, for nothing, nor do we women trick our husbands and speak prettily to them as if they were children to be coaxed and

humoured. I have good blood in my veins, but I am a woman of the people for all that, and I love frankness above all things, and there are things belonging to this dress, belonging to rich people I hate, and I always shall hate; never will I condescend to deceive you, to pretend to be what I am not—I cannot dissemble; do you see?' she cried; 'and if there is anything in my mind, it comes out in time—hatred or jealousy, or whatever it may be.'

'You are pretending to be what you are not when you make yourself out worse than you are,' Dick said gravely, chipping off a little piece of the cathedral with his penknife. The little bit of soft stone fell to the ground like dust—Reine looked up, hesitated, and suddenly calmed down. 'Forgive me,' she said, at last, with a thrilling low voice, 'I was wrong to doubt you;' and she tore off her glove and put her honest hand in his. Butler was touched, and stooped and kissed it; but he wished, and in his turn hated himself for wishing, that she had not pulled off her glove.

And so the martyr came out of her niche, and it was time to go, but before the wedding-party left the church some one whispered to M. Fontaine to come out by the side-door, for the funeral carriages were drawn up at the great front entrance.

Fontaine took his wife away to Rouen for a fortnight's distraction after the ceremony. While the two were going off in a nervous *tête-à-tête* in the *coupé* of a railway carriage,

the others were returning to Tracy, silent and depressed for the most part, like people after an unsuccessful expedition.

'I am going to smoke a cigar,' said Dick, looking in at the door of the carriage where Madame de Tracy and Marthe and the children were installed. De Tracy hearing this, started up from his seat and said he would come too, and Dick walked along the second-class carriages until he had made his selection.

In one corner of a crowded compartment sat a peasant-girl with two great baskets at her knees. De Tracy got in without even observing her, sat down at the other end of the bench, and let down the window and puffed his smoke out into the open air. Dick did not light his cigar at all, but sat turning one thing and another in his head. Once looking up he caught the glance of Reine's two kind eyes fixed upon him, and he could not help saying, 'What has become of the grand lady, Mademoiselle Chrétien?' Reine pointed to her baskets and looked down, trying to be grave. Butler did not speak to her any more; the compartment was full of blouses; he had only wanted to see her safe to her journey's end.

Dominique was at the station with the cart he had brought for Reine, and the Tracy carriage was waiting too. Madame de Tracy, nodding greetings right and left, got in, followed by Marthe and the children and little Toto, who was to spend a couple of days at the château before he

went to his grandmother. Madame de Tracy knew everybody by name, and graciously enquired after numbers of Christian names.

'Jean, there is that excellent Casimir,' pointing to a repulsive-looking man with one eye. 'Bring him here to me. How do you do? how is your poor wife? Ah, I forgot, you are not married. How are you yourself? Not coming, Jean? Then drive on, Jourdain. Baptiste, put Monsieur Toto on my great fur cloak; yes, my child, you must, indeed; I should never forgive myself if you were to catch cold now your papa is away. Never mind being a little too warm.' And so the carriage load drove off in slight confusion, poor Toto choking, and trying in vain to get his mouth out of the fur.

Meanwhile Dick went and helped Reine into her cart with as much courtesy as if she was a duchess getting into a magnificent chariot. She blushed, nodded good-night, and drove off immediately; and then Butler came back and joined his cousin, who was standing by, looking rather surprised.

'Come along, my Don Quixote,' said Jean, turning off the little platform and striking out towards the fields. It was a quiet twilight walk. They both went on in silence for a time. There was a sound of grasshoppers quizzing at their feet from every grass tuft and distant coppice and hedgerow. One or two villagers passed them, tramping home to their cottages.

'I hope my mother is satisfied,' said Jean de Tracy at last, 'and easy in her mind. I must confess, Dick, that I myself had some misgivings. That poor little thing! I could see very well that it was not Fontaine she was thinking of all the time. Hé! It is not the first wedding I have been at.'

Dick could not answer; he felt horribly guilty and uncomfortable. 'Heaven knows,' he was thinking to himself, 'I am unconscious of ever having said a word or done anything to make that poor child fancy I cared for her!' . . . He was haunted by the remembrance of that pale face looking in through the window, and yet it might have been a mere chance after all. His course was plain enough now; to Reine he had spoken words of love, to her he was bound by every tie of honour and sincere affection, and yet his head was full of all sorts of regrets and remorses. Reine's sudden outbreak had left a discomfort in his mind which he tried in vain to shake off—a discomfort which concerned Reine herself as well as poor little Catherine. He began to hate concealment, to tell himself that the sooner he had done with mysteries the better. Should he tell them all now, directly; should he speak to his cousin here walking beside him, and tell him of his plans, or wait a little longer until he had spoken to his uncle Charles first before declaring himself to the others? On the whole he decided this last plan would be best. But he vowed to himself that Reine at least should have no cause to reproach

him. 'At all events she is rich; they ought to approve of that,' thought Dick, bitterly. 'I shall have a terrible time of it, but that cannot be helped.' He would work hard and make himself independent, and brave the coming storm. It was true that she had enough for them both, even now; but to accept her money was an impossibility, and she had acknowledged it herself when she had once told him how rich she was.

Now that Reine knew him better, that a certain education in the way of the world had come to her, she began to understand better than she had done before their relative positions. It was no longer the poor and struggling artist aspiring to the hand of the rich *fermière* who had been so courted and much made of by the small dignitaries and needy *propriétaires* of the place. She understood better the differences between them; she began to see the gulf which she must cross if she did not wish to shock him and repulse him unconsciously at almost every step. He could not come to her as she had imagined once: she must go to him. Her heart failed her sometimes. That sham, idle, frittering, fidgety, trammelled, uneasy life had no attractions for her. Reine imagined herself playing the piano and nodding her head in time, and occasionally fanning herself with a scented pocket-handkerchief, and burst out laughing at the idea. Her notions of society were rather vague, and Dick hardly knew how to explain to her the things he was so used to.

'I hope you will never fan yourself with your pocket-handkerchief,' he said when Reine described her visions for the future. He owned to himself sometimes that she was right in what she said. He liked her best when he thought of her as herself, at home in her farm, with her servants and her animals round her. There she was, simple and gentle and thoughtful in all her ministrations, occupied always, unselfish, and only careful for others. After that last outbreak she met him with a sweet humility and womanliness which charmed him and touched him utterly. The night he said good-by to her she came out with him under the great arch, and stood looking at him with her noble tender face.

'Fate has done its best to separate us, has it not? said Reine, smiling; 'putting us like this, on different sides of the sea. But you will come back, is it not so? she said, 'and I have no fear any more. I shall wait for you here.'

The sunset was illuminating the old farm and the crumbling barns, and Petitpère's blue smock and white locks, as he sat on his bench smoking his evening pipe; some cows were crossing the road from one field to another, with tinkling bells sounding far into the distance; the great dog came up and rubbed his head at his mistress's knee. 'He will know you again,' Reine said, holding out both her hands, 'when you come back to me;' and so they parted.

The next day the whole family of Tracys started to-

gether for Paris. Madame *mère*, in a huge bonnet which almost completely concealed her face, was assisted from her apartment by her grandson to a close carriage. She was anxious to consult some Paris doctors on the state of her health.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADAME FONTAINE AT HOME IN THE CHÂLET.

Forget not yet the tried extent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail, so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet! Since first began
The weary life ye know,—since when
The suit, the service, none tell can.
Forget not yet!

When Catherine with her husband returned from their trip a fortnight later and looked out through the diligence windows at the château, the blinds were drawn, the shutters shut, the garden chairs were turned up on their seats, the great iron gates were closed fast. Catherine never had realised so completely that she was not coming back there any more, but to the little châlet with the balconies and weathercocks which Madame de Tracy had shown her. It was like the story of 'Rip Van Winkle:' she had been away among the elves and gnomes a hundred years. Everybody was gone that she was used to: Dick was gone, the others dispersed here and there; most of the

strangers lodging in the village had left; even Catherine George had vanished; Monsieur and Madame Mérard had retired to their *campagne*. It was a mouldy little villa on the high road to Bayeux, but Fontaine assured her from experience that they would doubtless return before long. Perhaps in his heart of hearts the worthy maire regretted that his *tête-à-tête* should be so soon interrupted, but he blamed himself severely for the inconsiderate feeling. 'After all that I owe to these excellent parents,' he explained, 'the magnificent *dot* which their daughter brought me, I feel that they must always look upon the châlet as their home whenever they feel inclined to do so. You, *ma très-chère amie*, are gifted with a happy and equable temper: I know you will not hesitate to bestow upon them those filial attentions which are so graceful when accorded by youth to old age. Believe me, I shall not be ungrateful.'

Catherine smiled at the solemn little address; she was glad that there was anything she could do for her husband. For already his kindness, his happiness, his entire contentment, had made her ashamed. 'Ah, it was cruel to have taken so much, to have so little to give in return,' she had thought once or twice. At least she would do her duty by him, she told herself, and it was with a very humble, and yet hopeful, heart that she passed the threshold of her new home. Toto was there to welcome them, and to trample upon all the folds of Catherine's muslin dress with his

happy little feet, and Justine, the excellent cook, came out to stare at the new inmate of the châlet.

'*Soyez la bienvenue*,' said Fontaine, embracing his wife affectionately; and they all three sat down very happily, to dine by the light of the lamp. The entertainment began with a melon.

'Grandmamma is coming on Saturday week,' said Toto. 'M. Pélottier will call for them on his way back from Caen.'

'Ah, so much the better,' said Justine, who was carrying away the empty dishes. Justine did not approve of second marriages.

Madame Fontaine soon found that she would have little or nothing to do with the domestic arrangements in the châlet. She was much too greatly in awe of Justine, the excellent cook, who had fried Fontaine's cutlets for fifteen years, to venture to interfere in the kitchen. Fontaine himself had been accustomed, during his long bachelor life and after his first wife's death, to interest himself in the cares of the ménage. He superintended the purchase of fish, the marketing, the proper concocting of the pot-au feu. He broke sugar, and made himself generally useful in the house. He might be discovered sometimes of a fine morning busily employed in the courtyard, sawing up pieces of wood for the stove. He cut pegs with his penknife to hang up the clothes in the field; he had even assisted on occasion to get them in before a shower came

down. He knocked nails, gardened, mended windows, signed papers for the villagers, contracts of marriage, agreements, disagreements. The people of Petitport were constantly coming to their maire for redress and advice.

Fontaine used to do his best to dissuade them from going to law, but the neighbours were tenacious of their rights, and enjoyed nothing so much as a good lawsuit. Even old Nanon Lefebvre once insisted on spending her wretched earnings in summoning her cousin Leroi at Bayeux, who had unjustly grasped a sum of two pounds, she declared, to which she was entitled. She lost her trial, and received back a few shillings from Fontaine's own pocket, with a lecture which she took in very ill part. She never would believe he had not made some secret profit by the transaction.

The very first morning after her arrival, Catherine, who was outside upon the terrace, heard the stormy voices of some of Monsieur le Maire's clients coming shrill and excited from the kitchen, where Fontaine often administered justice. From the little embankment Catherine could see the sea and the village street descending, and the lavatoire, where the village women in their black stockings and white coifs and cotton nightcaps were congregated, scrubbing and flapping and chattering together. The busy sounds came in gusts to Catherine in her garden, the fresh sea-breezes reached her scented by rose-trees. On fine days she could make out in the far distance the

faint shimmer of the rocks of the Calvados out at sea, where the Spanish galleon struck. It struck and went down, and all on board perished, so the legend runs, and the terrible rocks were called by its name for a warning. But nowadays all the country round is christened Calvados, and the name is so common that it has lost its terror.

Fontaine sometimes administered justice in the kitchen, sometimes in a little dark draughty office, where he kept odd pieces of string, some ink, some sealing-wax, and some carpenter's tools. The châlet was more picturesque than comfortable as a habitation. The winds came thundering against the thin walls and through the chinks and crevices; the weathercocks would go twirling madly round and round, with a sound like distant drums. In the spring-tides, Justine said, the water would come up over the embankment and spread over the marguerite beds and the rose-trees, and the rain falling from the cliff would make pools in front of the dining-room door. The drawing-room was upstairs. It was a room of which the shutters were always closed, the covers tied down tightly over the furniture, the tablecloths and rugs rolled up, and the piano locked. The room was never used. When Monsieur Mérard was there they were in the habit of sitting in his bedroom of an evening, Fontaine told his wife. 'C'est plus *snog*, comme vous dites,' he said. Catherine demurred at this, and begged to be allowed to open the

drawing-room, and make use of it and of the piano. Fontaine agreed—to what would he not have agreed that she wished?—but it was evidently a pang to him, and he seemed afraid of what Madame Mérard might say.

The second day seemed a little longer to Catherine than the first at the châlet, and the third a little longer than the second. Not to Fontaine, who settled down to his accustomed occupations, came, went, always taking care that Catherine should not be left for any time alone. Now and then, as days went on, she wished that she could be by herself a little more; she was used to solitude, and this constant society and attention was a little fatiguing. All that was expected from her was, 'Yes, mon ami,' 'No, mon ami.' At the end of a month it became just a little wearisome; for, counting the fortnight at Rouen, Catherine had now been married a month. Petitport had begun to put on its nightcap; scarcely anyone remained, shutters were put up, and there was silence in the street. She walked up to the farm, but Reine had been away at Caen for some time, Dominique told her. One day was like another. Nobody came. Fontaine talked on, and Catherine almost looked forward to the arrival of Toto's grandparents to break the monotony.

'Ce qui coûte le plus pour plaire, c'est de cacher que l'on s'ennuie.' Catherine had read this somewhere in a book of French maxims, and the words used to jangle in her ears long afterwards, as words do. Sometimes she

used to think of them involuntarily in those early days in the beginning of her married life, when she would be sitting by her own fireside alone with Fontaine. Monsieur le Maire was generally bolt upright on a stiff-backed chair by the table, delightedly contemplating the realisation of his dreams; while Madame Fontaine, on a low little seat by the fire, with her work falling upon her lap, was wondering, perhaps, whether this could be her own self and the end of all her vague ideals. The little gold ring upon her finger seemed to assure her it was so indeed. This was her home at last. There sat her husband, attentive, devoted, irreproachable, discursive—how discursive! Conversation was Fontaine's forte, his weakness, his passion, his necessity. The most utterly uninteresting and unlikely subjects would suggest words to this fertile brain; his talk was a wonder of ingenuity and unintermittingness. Now for the first time for many years he had secured a patient and a silent listener, and the torrent which had long been partially pent up had found a vent. Poor Fontaine was happy and in high spirits; and under the circumstances could any repetition, retrospection, interrogation, asseveration, be sufficient? Must not every possible form of speech be employed to tell Catherine how sensible he was to the happiness which had befallen him? 'And you too are happy,' he used to say, triumphantly; and if his wife smiled gratefully, and answered 'Yes,' no one, I think, could blame her.

She *was* happy after a fashion. It was so strange to be wanted, to be loved and of importance, and looked for and welcomed. She found this as difficult to believe in as all the rest. Fontaine was always thinking of what would give her pleasure. Her sisters were to come to her for their holidays always—whenever she liked, he said; and Catherine's heart beat with delight at the thought of welcoming them to her own roof. The pretty room upstairs, looking down the street, should be theirs, she thought; she would buy two little beds, some flower-pots for the window. Every day she looked in, on her way up and down, planning small preparations for them, and one little scheme and another to please them. How happy they would be! This thought was almost perfect delight to her. She loved to picture them there, with their little beloved ugly heads. She took Toto into her confidence, and one day he came rushing in with a plaster statuette of Napoleon at St. Helena he had bought in the street. 'C'est pour tes petites sœurs,' said he, and his stepmother caught him in her arms and covered his round face with kisses. Fontaine happened to be passing by the door at the moment. His double eyeglasses were quite dim, for his eyes had filled with tears of happiness as he witnessed the little scene.

'Je me trouve tout attendri!' said he, coming in. 'Ah, mon amie, you have made two people very happy by

coming here. I am shedding tears of joy. They relieve the heart.'

It was a pathetic jumble. When Fontaine was unconscious he was affecting in his kindliness and tenderness of heart, and then the next moment he would by an afterthought become suddenly absurd.

In the first excitement of his return Fontaine had forgotten many little harmless precisions and peculiarities which gradually revived as time went by. On the morning that Monsieur and Madame Mérard were expected he appeared in a neat baize apron, dusting with a feather brush, arranging furniture, bustling in and out of the kitchen, and personally superintending all the preparations made to receive them.

'Can't I do something?' Catherine timidly asked.

'Leave me, my child,' said Fontaine, embracing her. 'I am busy.'

Catherine knew it was silly, but she could not bear to see him so occupied. She took her work, went and sat in the dining-room window waiting, and as she sat there she thought of the day she had come with Madame de Tracy, a stranger, to the gate of her future home.

Toto came running in at last to announce the arrival of his grandmother and grandfather. Fontaine took off his apron and rushed into the garden, and Catherine went and stood at the door to welcome them, a little shy, but

glad on the whole to do her best to please her husband and his relations.

Monsieur and Madame Mérard were heavy people. They had to be carefully helped down from the little high carriage in which they had arrived by Justine and Fontaine, who together carried in their moderate boxes and packages. Although her trunk was small, Madame Mérard was neatly and brilliantly dressed. Monsieur Mérard, who was a very stout old gentleman, wore slippers, a velvet cap, and short checked trowsers. He took off his coat immediately on arriving, as a matter of course, and sat down, breathless, in a chair near the window. 'Venez, mon amie,' said Fontaine, much excited, leading Catherine up by the hand. 'Mon père, ma mère' (the maire had a turn for oratory and situation), 'I bring you a daughter,' he said; 'accord to her a portion of that affection you have for many years bestowed on me.'

A snuffy kiss from Madame Mérard on her forehead, something between a sniff and a shake of the head, was the portion evidently reserved for Catherine. Monsieur Mérard signed to her to advance, and also embraced her slowly, on account of his great size. After that they seemed to take no more notice of her, only every now and then Catherine felt the old lady's sharp eyes fixed upon her like the prick of two pins.

'Well, Justine,' said Madame Mérard, addressing the cuisiniere. 'Has everything been going on well? You

have taken good care of Monsieur and of Toto? What are you going to give us for our breakfast to-day?'

'Monsieur is responsible for the breakfast,' said Justine, irascible now that she was sure of an ally. 'If he thinks it is possible for a cook to attend to her business when the masters are perpetually in and out of the kitchen he is much mistaken.'

'You are right, ma fille,' said Madame Mérard, soothingly. 'I have told him so a hundred times. Eh bien, dites-moi! Where have you been taking your butter since I left?'

'I have taken it from Madame Binaud, as madame desired,' said Justine.

'That is right,' said Madame Mérard, 'and yet there is no trusting anyone. Imagine, Charles! that I have been paying thirty-eight sous a pound. It was for good Isyngny butter, that is true, but thirty-eight sous! Ah, it is abominable. How much do you pay for butter in England, madame?' said the old lady, suddenly turning round upon Catherine, and evidently expecting a direct answer to a plain question.

'Half-a-cr—— I don't know,' said Catherine, looking to Fontaine to help her. Fontaine turned away much disappointed: he wanted his wife to shine, and he guessed the painful impression her ignorance would produce.

'Ho, ho,' said old Mérard, in a droll little squeaking voice, 'Madame Mérard must give you some lessons, my

young lady.' He was good-naturedly trying to avert disagreeables.

'Lessons,' said Madame Mérard, hoarsely. 'It is no longer the fashion for young women to interest themselves in the management of their domestic expenses. It is perhaps because they contribute nothing to them.'

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coming towards her. He looked beaming, as if he had just heard good news; he waved his hand in the air, and sprang lightly forward to where she was standing.

'All the morning I have not been without anxiety; I was afraid that something was wrong,' he confided frankly to Catherine. 'But now I am greatly relieved. My mother is telling Monsieur le Curé that she and my step-father fully intend to pass the winter with us.' Catherine tried to say something, but could not succeed—her husband noticed nothing.

Fontaine, from the very good nature and affectionate fidelity of his disposition, seemed to cling very much to his early associates, and to the peculiar prejudices which he had learnt from them. The odd ways were familiar to him, the talk did not seem strange. It was of people and places he had known all his life. Their habits did not offend any very fine sense of taste. The translations which English minds make to themselves of foreign ways and customs are necessarily incorrect and prejudiced. Things which to Catherine seemed childish, partly humorous, partly wearisome, were to Fontaine only the simple and natural arrangements of every day. He could sit contentedly talking for hours in his cabane, with the little flag flying from the roof. He could play away the bright long afternoons with a greasy pack of cards or a box of dominoes. He could assume different costumes with perfect complacency—the sport costume, when he

went to the shooting-gallery some enterprising speculator had opened at Bayeux—the black gaiters *pour affaire*—the red flannel shirt for the sea-side stroll. . . . Fontaine asked her one day if she would come down to the château with him. He had some business with the bailiff who was to meet him there. Leaving the Mérards installed upon the terrace, Catherine went for her hood and her cloak, and walked down the steep little ascent, and through the street, arm-in-arm with Monsieur le Maire. She had not been at the place since she left on the eve of her marriage. She began to think of it all; she remembered her doubts, her despair. They came to the gates at last, where only a few weeks ago Dick had told her of his love for Reine; the whole thing seemed running through her head like the unwinding of a skein. While Fontaine was talking to the bailiff she went and rang the bell, and told Baptiste, who opened the door, that she wanted to go up to her room.

'Mais certainement, madame! Vous allez bien. Vous voyez il n'y a plus personne.' Catherine crossed the hall, and looked into the deserted drawing-room—how different it looked—how silent! The voices and music had drifted elsewhere, and Catherine George, she no longer existed, only a little smoke was left curling from the charred embers and relics of the past. Thinking thus, she went up to her own old little room, which was

dismantled and looked quite empty, and as if it had belonged to a dead person.

Catherine's heart was very full; she looked round and about; the sunset was streaming in through the curtainless window: she heard the faint old sound of the sea; she went to the little secrétaire presently, and opened one of the drawers and looked in.

That last night when she had been packing her clothes, she had come upon one little relic which she had not had the heart to destroy. She had thrust it into a drawer in the bureau where she had already thrown some dead marguerites, and locked it in. No one finding it there would have been any the wiser. It was only a dead crumpled brown rose which Dick had picked up off the grass one day, but that had not prevented it from withering like other roses. It was still lying in the drawer among a handful of dry marguerites. Who would have guessed that the whole story of her life was written upon these withered stalks and leaves? She felt as if the story and life all had belonged to some one else. She opened the drawer—no one else had been there. As she took up the rose a thorn pricked her finger. 'Neither scent, nor colour, nor smell, only a thorn left to prick,' Catherine sadly sighed: 'these other poor limp flowers at least have no thorns.' So she thought. Then she went and sat down upon the bed, and began to tell herself how good Fontaine had been to her, and to say to herself that it

was too late now to wonder whether she had done rightly or wrongly in marrying him. But, at least, she would try to be good, and contented, and not ungrateful. Perhaps, if she was very good, and patient, and contented, she might see Dick again some day, and be his friend and Reine's, and the thorn would be gone out of the dead rose. Fontaine's voice calling her name disturbed her resolutions.

She found her husband waiting for her at the foot of the stairs.

'Shall we revisit together the spot where we first read in each other's hearts,' said he, sentimentally

'Not this evening,' said Catherine, gently. 'I should like to go down to the sea before it grows quite dark.'

Everybody had not left Petitport, for one or two families were still sitting in their little wooden boxes along the edge of the sands, and a hum of conversation seemed sounding in the air with the monotonous wash of the sea. The ladies wore bright-coloured hoods; the waves were grey, fresh and buoyant, rising in crisp crests against a faint yellow sky. A great line of soft clouds curled and tossed by high currents of wind was crossing the sea. One or two pale brown stars were coming out one by one, pulsating like little living hearts in the vast universe. Catherine went down close to the water's edge, and then threw something she held in her hand as far as she could throw.

'What is that?' Fontaine asked, adjusting his eye-glass.

'Only some dead flowers I found in a drawer,' said Catherine.

'My dear child, why give yourself such needless trouble?' asked the practical husband. 'You might have left them where they were or in the courtyard, if you did not wish to litter the room, or . . .'

'It was a little piece of sentiment,' said Catherine, humbly trying to make a confession. 'Some one gave me a rose once in England, long ago, and . . .'

'Some one who—who—who loved you,' Fontaine interrupted, in a sudden fume, stammering and turning round upon her.

'Oh, no,' Catherine answered: 'you are the only person who has ever loved me.'

She said it so gently and sweetly, that Fontaine was touched beyond measure. And yet, though she spoke gently, his sudden anger had terrified her. She felt guilty that she could not bring herself to tell him more. She could not have made him understand her; why disquiet him with stories of the past, and destroy his happiness and her own too? Alas! already this had come to her.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE TWILIGHT AT LAMBSWOLD.

So each shall mourn in life's advance
Dear hopes, dear friends, untimely killed;
Shall grieve for many a forfeit chance,
And longing passion unfulfilled.
Amen: whatever Fate be sent,—
Pray God the heart may kindly glow,
Although the head with cares be bent,
And whitened with the winter snow.

It seemed that there were many things of which Fontaine was unconscious. Catherine never dared to trust him with the secret of Dick's engagement to Reine Chrétien. This was too valuable a piece of gossip to be confided to the worthy maire's indiscretion. The country people talked a little; but they were all used to Mademoiselle Chrétien's odd independent ways, and after Dick had been gone some weeks they appeared for a time to trouble their heads no more about him.

But Richard Butler reached home more than ever determined to make a clean breast of it, as the saying goes. Reine's good-by and last bright look seemed to give him courage. What would he not do for her sake?

Her knight in ancient times would have gone out valiantly, prepared to conquer dragons, fierce giants, monsters of land and sea. The only fierce dragon in Butler's way was the kind old man at Lambswold; and yet, somehow, he thought he would rather encounter many dragons, poisonous darts, fiery tails and all. But then he thought again of Reine standing in the sunset glory, in all her sweet nobility, and a gentle look came into Dick's own face. Women who have the rare gift of great beauty may well cherish it, and be grateful to Heaven. With the unconscious breath of a moment, they can utter all that is in them. They have said it at once, for ever, while others are struggling for words, toiling with effort, trying in vain to break the bonds which fetter them so cruelly. What sermon, what text, is like that of a tender heart, speaking silently in its own beauty and purity, and conscious only of the meaning of its own sincerity? What words can speak so eloquently as the clear sweet eyes looking to all good, all love, all trust, encouraging with their tender smile?

Queen's Walk did not look so deserted as the other more fashionable parts of London. The dirty little children had not left town. The barges were sailing by; the garden-door was set wide open. The housekeeper let him in, smiling, in her best cap. Mr. Beamish was away, she told him, in Durham, with his father, who was recovering, poor gentleman. There were a great many letters waiting

on the 'all-table, she said. Dick pulled a long face at the piles of cheap-looking envelopes, directed very low down, with single initial-letters upon the seals. Mrs. Busby had cleaned down and rubbed up the old staircase to shining pitch. The studio, too, looked very clean and cool and comfortable. Everybody was away. Mr. and Mrs. Hervey Butler were at Brighton, and Mr. Charles Butler had not been up in town for some time; Mr. Beamish had desired all his letters to be forwarded to Durham; he was coming back as soon as he could leave his father.

Everybody knows the grateful, restful feeling of coming home after a holiday; crowded hotels, fierce landladies' extortions, excursions, all disappear up the chimney; everything looks clean and comfortable; the confusion of daily life is put to rights for a time, and one seems to start afresh. Mrs. Busby had had the carpets beat, she said, and dinner would be quite ready at six. Dick, who was not sorry to have an excuse to stay where he was and to put off the announcement he had in his mind, wrote a few words to Lambswold, saying that he would come down in a week or two, as soon as he had finished a picture he had brought back with him from Tracy.

For some weeks Dick worked very hard; harder than he had ever done in his life before. 'I suppose the figures upon my canvas have come there somehow out of my brain,' he wrote to Reine, 'but they seem to have an odd distinct life of their own, so that I am sometimes almost frightened

at my own performance.' The picture he was painting was a melancholy one; a wash of brown transparent sea, a mist of grey sky, and some black-looking figures coming across the shingle, carrying a drowned man. A woman and a child were plodding dully alongside. It was unlike any of the pictures Butler had ever painted before. There was no attempt at detail, everything was vague and undetermined, but the waves came springing in, and it seemed as if there was a sunlight behind the mist. . . . Sometimes he fell into utter despondency over his work, plodding on at it as he did day after day with no one to speak to, or to encourage him; but he struggled on, and at last said to himself one day, that with all its faults and incompleteness, there was more true stuff in it than in anything he had yet produced.

One day Dick received a short note in his uncle Charles's careful handwriting:—'When are you coming down here?' the old man wrote. 'I have not been well, or I should have been up to town. I suppose you could paint here as well as in your studio or under Matilda's auspices? but this place is dismal, and silent, and empty, and has no such attractions as those which, from all accounts, Tracy seems to hold out, so I shall not be surprised if I do not see you. Mundy takes very good care of me. If I really want you I will send for you. Yours,—C. B.'

'What has he heard?' thought Dick, when he read the note. 'Who can have told him anything? Is he

vexed or only out of spirits?' Butler felt he must go of course. It was tiresome, now that he was just getting into the swing, and doing the first piece of work which was worth the canvas upon which it was painted. As for taking his picture there, Dick was more afraid of his uncle's sarcastic little compliments than of any amount of criticism; and, besides, there was no knowing what might be the result of their meeting. He would go down and pay him a visit, and tell him his story, and then if he were not turned out for ever, it would be time enough to see about transporting the canvas.

Dick took his ticket in a somewhat injured frame of mind. All the way down in the railway carriage he was rehearsing the scene that was to take place; he took a perverse pleasure in going over it again and again. Sometimes he turned himself out of doors, sometimes he conjured up Charles Butler's harsh little sarcastic laugh, sneering and disowning him. Once he saw himself a traitor abandoning Reine for the sake of a bribe: but no, that was impossible; that was the only thing which could not happen. When he got to the station he had to hire the fly, as he was not expected, and to drive along the lanes. They were damp and rotting with leaves: grey mists came rolling along the furrows; a few belated birds were singing an autumnal song.

'They say the old gentleman's a-breaking up fast,' said the flyman, cheerfully, as he dismounted at the foot

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at my own performance.' The picture he was painting was a melancholy one; a wash of brown transparent sea, a mist of grey sky, and some black-looking figures coming across the shingle, carrying a drowned man. A woman and a child were plodding dully alongside. It was unlike any of the pictures Butler had ever painted before. There was no attempt at detail, everything was vague and undetermined, but the waves came springing in, and it seemed as if there was a sunlight behind the mist. . . . Sometimes he fell into utter despondency over his work, plodding on at it as he did day after day with no one to speak to, or to encourage him; but he struggled on, and at last said to himself one day, that with all its faults and incompleteness, there was more true stuff in it than in anything he had yet produced.

One day Dick received a short note in his uncle Charles's careful handwriting:—'When are you coming down here?' the old man wrote. 'I have not been well, or I should have been up to town. I suppose you could paint here as well as in your studio or under Matilda's auspices? but this place is dismal, and silent, and empty, and has no such attractions as those which, from all accounts, Tracy seems to hold out, so I shall not be surprised if I do not see you. Mundy takes very good care of me. If I really want you I will send for you. Yours,—C. B.'

'What has he heard?' thought Dick, when he read the note. 'Who can have told him anything? Is he

vexed or only out of spirits?' Butler felt he must go of course. It was tiresome, now that he was just getting into the swing, and doing the first piece of work which was worth the canvas upon which it was painted. As for taking his picture there, Dick was more afraid of his uncle's sarcastic little compliments than of any amount of criticism; and, besides, there was no knowing what might be the result of their meeting. He would go down and pay him a visit, and tell him his story, and then if he were not turned out for ever, it would be time enough to see about transporting the canvas.

Dick took his ticket in a somewhat injured frame of mind. All the way down in the railway carriage he was rehearsing the scene that was to take place; he took a perverse pleasure in going over it again and again. Sometimes he turned himself out of doors, sometimes he conjured up Charles Butler's harsh little sarcastic laugh, sneering and disowning him. Once he saw himself a traitor abandoning Reine for the sake of a bribe: but no, that was impossible; that was the only thing which could not happen. When he got to the station he had to hire the fly, as he was not expected, and to drive along the lanes. They were damp and rotting with leaves: grey mists came rolling along the furrows; a few belated birds were singing an autumnal song.

'They say the old gentleman's a-breaking up fast,' said the flyman, cheerfully, as he dismounted at the foot

of one of the muddy hills. 'He's not an old man, by no means yet, but my missis she see him go by last Sunday for'night, and says she to me just so, "Why," says she, "old Mr. Butler ain't half the man he wer' in the spring-time."'

Dick could not help feeling uncomfortable; he was not in the best of spirits; the still, close afternoon, with the rotting vegetation all about, and the clouds bearing heavily down, predisposed him to a gloomy view of things. They drove in at the well-known gates.

'I hope I shall find my uncle better,' he said, trying to speak hopefully, as he got down at the hall-door, and ran up the old-fashioned steps. Mundy opened the door.

'Oh, Mr. Richard,' he said, 'I have just been writing to you. My master is very poorly, I am sorry to say—very poorly indeed.'

Old Mr. Butler was alone in the morning-room when his nephew came in. He had had a fire lighted, and he was sitting, wrapped in an old-fashioned palm dressing-gown, in a big chair drawn close up to the fender. The tall windows were unshuttered still, and a great cloud of mist was hanging like a veil over the landscape.

'Well,' my dear boy, said a strange, yet familiar voice, 'I didn't expect you so soon.'

It was like some very old man speaking and holding out an eager trembling hand. As old Butler spoke, he

shut up and put into his pocket a little old brown prayer-book in which he had been reading. Dick, who had been picturing imaginary pangs to himself all the way coming down, now found how different a real aching pain is to the visionary emotions we all inflict upon ourselves occasionally. It was with a real foreboding that he saw that some terrible change for the worse had come over the old man. His face was altered, his voice faint and sharp, and his hand was burning.

'Why didn't you send for me, my dear Uncle Charles? I never knew . . . I only got your letter this morning. If I had thought for one instant. . . .'

'My note was written last week,' said Charles. 'I kept it back on purpose. You were hard at work, weren't you?' Dick said nothing. He had got tight hold of the trembling burning hand. 'I'm very bad,' said old Charles, looking up at the young fellow. 'You won't have long to wait for my old slippers.'

'Don't, my dear, dear old boy,' cried Dick.

'Pah!' said old Butler, 'your own turn will come sooner or later. You won't find it difficult to go. I think you won't,' said the old broken man, patting Dick's hand gently.

Dick was so shocked by the suddenness of the blow he was scarcely able to believe it.

'Have you seen anyone?' the young man asked.

'I've seen Hickson, and this morning Dr. de M——

came down to me,' Charles Butler answered, as if it was a matter of every-day occurrence. 'He says it's serious, so I told Mundy to write to you.'

Old Charles seemed quite cheerful and in good spirits; he described his symptoms, and seemed to like talking of what might be—he even made little jokes.

'You ungrateful boy,' he said, smiling, 'there is many a young man who would be thankful for his good luck, instead of putting on a scared face like yours. Well, what have you been about?'

It was horrible. Dick tried to answer and to speak as usual, but he turned sick once, and bit his lip, and looked away, when his uncle, after a question or two, began telling him about some scheme he wanted carried out upon the estate.

'Won't you send for Uncle Hervey,' Dick said gravely, 'or for my aunt?'

'Time enough, time enough,' the other answered. 'They make such a talking. I want to put matters straight first. I've got Baxter coming here this afternoon.'

Mr. Baxter was the family attorney. Dick had for the minute forgotten all about what he had come intending to say. Now he looked in the fire, and suddenly told himself that if he had to tell his uncle what had been on his mind all these last months, the sooner it was done the better. But now, at such a crisis—it was an impossibility.

So the two sat by the fire in the waning light of the short autumn day. The night was near at hand, Dick thought. There was a ring at the bell, and some one came in from the hall. It was not the lawyer, but Dr. Hickson again, and it seemed like a reprieve to the young man to have a few minutes longer to make up his mind. He followed the doctor out into the hall. His grave face was not reassuring. Dick could see it by the light of the old lattice-window.

'Tell me honestly,' he said, 'what do you think of my uncle's state. I never even heard he was ill till this morning.'

'My dear Mr. Richard,' said Dr. Hickson, 'we must hope for the best. Dr. de M—— agreed with me in considering the case very serious. I cannot take upon myself to disguise this from you. Your uncle himself has but little idea of recovering: his mind is as yet wonderfully clear and collected . . . and there may be little change for weeks, but I should advise you to see that any arrangements . . . Dear me! dear me!'

The little overworked doctor hurried down the steps and rode away, all out of spirits, and leaving scant comfort behind him. He was thinking of all that there was to make life easy and prosperous in that big, well-ordered house, and of his own little struggling home, with his poor Polly and her six babies, who would have scarcely enough to put bread in their mouths if he were to be

taken. He was thinking that it was a lonely ending to a lonely life; with only interested people watchers, waiting by the old man's deathbed. Dr. Hickson scarcely did justice to Dick, who had spoken in his usual quiet manner, who had made no professions, but who was pacing up and down the gravel sweep, backwards and forwards and round and round, bareheaded, in the chill dark, not thinking of inheritance or money, but only of the kind, forbearing benefactor to whom he owed so much, and towards whom he felt like a traitor in his heart.

He went back into the morning-room, where Mundy had lighted some candles, and he forced himself to look hopeful, but he nearly broke down when Charles began saying in his faint, cheerful voice, 'I've made a most unjust will. Baxter is bringing it for me to sign this evening. I have left almost everything to a scapegrace nephew of mine, who will, I am afraid, never make a fortune for himself. Shall I throw in the Gainsborough?' he added, nodding at the lady who was smiling as usual out of her frame. 'You will appreciate her some day.' There was a moment's silence. Dick flushed up, and the veins of his temples began to throb, and a sort of cloud came before his eyes. He must speak. He could not let his uncle do this, when, if he knew all, he would for certain feel and act so differently. He tried to thank him, but the words were too hard to utter. He would have given much to keep silence, but he could not somehow.

Charles wondered at his agitation, and watched him moving uneasily. Suddenly he burst out.

'Uncle Charles,' said Dick at last, with a sort of choke for breath, 'don't ask why; leave me nothing—except—except the Gainsborough, if you will. I mustn't take your money . . . .'

'What the devil do you mean?' said the old man frightened, and yet trying to laugh. 'What have you been doing?'

'I've done no wrong,' Dick said, looking up, with the truth in his honest eyes, and speaking very quick. 'I don't want to bother you now. I want to do something you might not approve. I had come down to tell you, and I couldn't let you make your will without warning . . . .'

The young fellow had turned quite pale, but the horrible moment was past, the temptation to silence was overcome. In all Dick's life this was one of the hardest straits he ever encountered. It was not the money; covetousness was not one of his faults, but he said to himself that he should have sacrificed faith, honour, anything, everything, sooner than have had the cruelty to inflict one pang at such a time. But the next instant something told him he had done right; he saw that a very gentle, tender look had come into the old man's eyes as he leant back in his chair.

'I suppose you are going to get married,' Charles said,

faintly, 'and that is the meaning of all this? Well,' he went on, recovering peevishly, 'why the deuce don't you go on, sir?'

This little return of the old manner made it easier for the young man to speak. 'I've promised to marry a woman; I love her, and that is my secret,' he said, still speaking very quickly. 'I'm not quite crazy; she is educated and good, and very beautiful, but she is only a farmer's daughter at Tracy. Her mother was a lady, and her name is Reine Chrétien.'

Dick, having spoken, sat staring at the fire.

'And—and you mean to establish that—this farmer's daughter here as soon as . . . .' Charles, trembling very much, tried to get up from his chair, and sank down again.

'You know I don't,' said Dick, with a sad voice, 'or I should not have told you.'

Then there was another silence.

'I—I can't bear much agitation,' Charles said at last, while a faint colour came into his cheeks. 'Let us talk of something else. Is the paper come yet? Ring the bell and ask.'

The paper had come, and Dick read out column after column, scarcely attending to the meaning of one word before him. And yet all the strange every-day life rushing into the sick room jarred horribly upon his nerves. Records of speeches and meetings, and crime,

and advertisements—all the busy stir and roar of the world seemed stamped upon the great sheet before him. His own love and interest and future seemed part of this unquiet tide of life; while the whole man sat waiting in his big chair, away from it all; and the fire burnt quietly, lighting up the room, and outside the white mist was lying upon the trees and the gardens.

At last Dick saw, to his great relief, that his uncle had fallen asleep, and then he gently got up from his chair, and went and looked out at the twilight lawn. He thought of the picnic, and all the figures under the trees; he could not face the present, his mind turned and shifted, as people's minds do in the presence of great realities.

'Dick!' cried the old man, waking anxiously, 'are you there? Don't leave me. I shall be more comfortable in bed. Call Mundy, and help me up.'

They had to carry him almost up the old-fashioned wooden flight.

Richard Butler dined alone in the great dismal dining-room, and while he was at dinner Mundy told him the lawyer had come. 'Mr. Butler desired me to open a bottle of his best claret for you, sir,' said Mundy; 'he wishes to see you again after dinner. Mr. Baxter is with him now.'

The lawyer had not left when Dick came into the room. He was tying red tape round long folded slips of

paper and parchment. Old Charles was in his old-fashioned four-post bed, with the ancient chintz hangings, upon which wonderful patterns of dragons and phœnixes had been stamped. Dick had often wondered at these awful scrolled figures when he was a child; he used to think they were horrible dreams which had got fixed upon the curtains somehow. Charles was sitting upright in the middle of it all: he had shrunk away and looked very small.

'I'm more comfortable up here,' the old man said. 'I've been talking to Mr. Baxter about this business of yours, Dick. It's lucky for you, sir, it didn't happen a year ago—isn't it, Baxter?'

'Your uncle shows great trust in you, Mr. Butler,' the attorney said. 'There are not many like him who . . . .'

'You see, Dick, one thing now is very much the same as another to me,' interrupted the master of Lambswold. 'It seems a risk to run, but that is your look-out, as you say, and I should have known nothing about it if you had not told me. If in another year's time you have not changed your mind . . . Mr. Baxter has provided, as you will find. I have experienced a great many blessings in my life,' he said, in an altered tone,—'a very great many. I don't think I have been as thankful as I might have been for them, and—and—— I should like you, too, to have some one you care for by your bedside when

Lambswold changes masters again,' Charles Butler said, holding out his kind old hand once more. 'I was very fond of your mother, Dick.'

Dick's answer was very incoherent, but his uncle understood him. Only the old man felt a doubt as to the young man's stability of purpose, and once more spoke of the twelve months which he desired should elapse before the marriage was publicly announced; he asked him to say nothing for the present. He owned with a faint smile that he did not want discussion.

Of course Dick promised; and then he wrote to Reine, and told her of the condition and of the kind old uncle's consent.

Twelve months seemed but a very little while to Dick, faithful and busy, with a prosperous lifetime opening before him. As days went on his uncle rallied a little; but he knew that this improvement could not continue, and of course he was not able to get away. He often wrote to Reine, and in a few simple words he would tell her of his gratitude to his uncle, and of his happiness in the thought of sharing his future, whatever it might be, with her. 'Although Heaven knows,' he said, 'how sincerely I pray that this succession may be put off for years; for you, my Reine, do not care for these things, and will take me, I think, without a farthing.'

But a year to Reine was a long weary time of

suspense to look forward to. She found the strain very great; the doubts, which returned for all her efforts against them, the terror of what might be in store. She loved Dick as she hated his surroundings, and sometimes she almost feared that her love was not worthy of his, and sometimes the foolish, impatient woman would cry out to herself that it was he who wanted to be set free.

CHAPTER XVI.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS.

The trembling notes ascend the sky,
And heavenly joys inspire.
* * * *
Hark! hark! the horrid sound!

It had required all Fontaine's persuasion, backed by the prestige of his municipal authority, to persuade Justine to open the drawing-room shutters, and to allow Catherine to use that long-abandoned territory. With many mumbles and grumblings and rumblings of furniture, the innovation had been achieved a few days before Madame Mérard's return; Monsieur Fontaine himself assisting in most of the work, or it never would have been accomplished. He was not the man to do things by halves. Catherine wished for a drawing-room and a piano; poor Léonie's instrument was standing there, it is true, but cracked and jarred, and with a faded front. Soon a piece of bright new red silk replaced the sickly green, the rosewood complexion was polished to a brilliant brown by the indefatigable master of the house; he would have

tuned it if he could, but this was beyond his powers, and the organist was mysteriously brought in by a back-door, while Toto was desired to detain Catherine on the terrace until a preconcerted signal should announce that all was ready for her to be brought in, in triumph. Monsieur le Maire was delighted. He led her in with both hands, and then stepped back to contemplate the result of his labours. 'Now we shall make music,' he said. 'Come, Catherine! place yourself at the piano. Another day, perhaps I myself . . . .' Catherine looked up with her dark grateful eyes, and began to play as she was bid.

Monsieur Fontaine contented himself at first by beating time to his wife's performance, with great spirit and accuracy; but one evening, somewhat to her dismay, he produced a cornet, which he had disinterred from its green-baize sarcophagus and rubbed up during office hours. He had practised upon it in his early youth, and he now amused himself by accompanying the movements of Catherine's gentle little fingers with sudden sounds, somewhat uncertain perhaps, but often very loud. Justine sulkily called it a 'vacarme,' as she banged the kitchen-door. Passers-by, driving their cows or plodding home with their fish-baskets, stopped outside astonished, to ask what it could be. The old cider-bibbers at Pélottier's could hear the rich notes when the wind blew in that direction. Poor Madame Fontaine

herself burst out laughing, and put her hands up to her ears the first time she heard her husband's music; but Monsieur le Maire instantly stopped short, and looked so pained and disappointed that she begged him to go on and immediately began to play again. Only she took care afterwards to select the calmest and the most pastoral and least impassioned music in her repertory. When she came to passages marked *con expressione* or with *arpeggios*, or when she saw *f f f*'s looming appallingly in the distance, she would set her teeth and brace up her courage for the onslaught. By degrees, however, Fontaine's first ardour toned down, or Catherine's nerves grew stronger. Toto thought it great fun, only he wished they would play polkas and waltzes, as he stood leaning against the piano with his round eyes fixed upon Catherine's face. People almost always look their best when they are making music: how often one sees quite plain and uninteresting faces kindle with sweet sound into an unconscious harmony of expression. Catherine was no great performer, but she played with feeling and precision. There always was a charm about her, which it would be difficult to define, and now especially, with her dark head bent a little forward to where the light fell upon her music-book, she would have made a lovely little study—for Dick Butler, let us say. 'A Woman set to Music' it might have been called; she felt nothing but a harmony of sound at such a time, ex-

cept, indeed, when the cornet burst in with a wrong note. Monsieur Fontaine, between the intervals of his own performance, liked to look at her proudly and admiringly. Any stranger coming in would have thought it a pretty picture of a happy family group, and carried away the pleasant image.

Justine was not so easily taken in. Having banged her door, she would shrug her shoulders down in her kitchen below; she could bide her time. Madame Mérard was coming. *She* was not fond of music any more than Justine.

Fontaine felt as if some guilty secret was buried in his bosom, when for the first two nights after the old people's arrival, he tried to make excuses for remaining downstairs in the dining-room, and was glad that Catherine retired early with a headache. Justine said nothing. She left everybody to make their own discoveries. They would not be long about, she knew; for Madame Mérard's fierce little eyes went poking here and there, with a leisurely yet unceasing scrutiny.

It was Madame Mérard who had educated Justine, placed her in Fontaine's kitchen, and desired her to remain there; and the invaluable servant had accordingly for years past done her best to make his life miserable, his soup and his coffee clear, strong, and well-flavoured. She did many other things—washed, scrubbed, marketed, waited at table, put Toto to bed—no easy matter. She

would go about with the air of a sulky martyr, working miracles against her will. Madame de Tracy, with all her household, was not so well served as Fontaine, with this terrible ewe-lamb of his.

Madame Mérard was the only person who ventured to drive this alarming creature; but then, to judge from the old lady's conversation, she seemed gifted with a sort of second-sight. She could see through cupboard-doors, into the inside of barrels; she could overhear conversations five miles off, or the day after to-morrow. Madame Nicholas must have been nearly demented when she tried to palm off her Tuesday's eggs upon her last Friday. Justine herself never attempted to impose upon this mistress-mind, and would take from her, in plain language, what the maire, with all his official dignity, would never have ventured to hint.

At Madame Mérard's own suggestion and Justine's, a girl from the village had been lately added to the establishment. A girl? a succession of girls rather. They would come up in their Sunday-clothes, smiling and cheerful, bobbing curtseys, to the Mérards, to Toto, to Monsieur, to Madame, to the all-powerful Justine, anxious for employment and willing to do their best. And then they would immediately begin to perish away, little by little: smiles would fade, the colour go out of their cheeks, and one day at last they would disappear and never be heard of any more. Justine the Terrible had claws, and a long

tongue, and a heavy hand; she did not drive them over the cliff, but she sent them home in tears to their mothers. Fontaine used to try to interfere in the behalf of these victims, but it was in vain. Catherine made a desperate sally once into the kitchen; she was routed ignominiously by Madame Mérard, who would be superintending the punishment.

'Why don't you send Justine away?' Catherine said to her husband one morning after one of these scenes.

'My dear, you do not think of what you are saying! It is not from you, my dear Catherine, that I should have expected such a proposition.' And Fontaine, who had interrupted his hammering for an instant, shocked at the bold proposal, resumed his occupation.

Madame Mérard had observed one or two motes calling for remark in the last arrival's goggle blue eyes, and she went stumping downstairs early one morning for a little consultation in the kitchen before breakfast. The old lady, in her morning costume, and short jacket or camisole, and stiff starch cap, and slippers, managed to look quite as formidable as she did later in the day. Her mustachios seemed to curl more fiercely, unrelieved by the contrast of a varied and brilliant toilette; her little even white teeth, with which she could crack a whole plateful of nuts, seemed to gleam beneath the mustachios. Madame Mérard was surprised to see that the drawing-room door was open as she passed; still more aghast was she

when she looked in and perceived the shutters unclosed, the little bits of rug spread out here and there upon the floor, the furniture standing on its legs, instead of being piled up in a heap, the piano dragged out from its dark recess into a convenient angle for playing. . . . What was the meaning of all this? What madness did it denote? Were they going to give an evening party? Had they given one without her knowledge? The old lady trotted up to the piano—her own daughter's piano—magnificently done up, with music piled upon the top! She looked round and saw a window open, a cup with flowers in the window, and a work-basket and writing materials upon the table. . . . The light began to dawn upon her. What! did they make a common sitting-room of Léonie's state drawing-room, which was never made use of in her lifetime except on the occasion of Toto's christening, and once when a ball was given which Madame Mérard herself had opened? Oh, it could not be! it was impossible! But as she was still staring, bewildered, the door opened, and Catherine came in, looking quite at home, bringing some more leaves and berries from her winter-garden, and looking as if she was quite used to the place and sat in it every hour of the day.

'Good morning,' said Madame Fontaine, in her gentle, cheerful way, unconscious of the sword hanging over her head. 'I think breakfast is on the table.'

'Indeed!' said Madame Mérard. 'I am looking in

surprise, madame. I was not aware of the changes which had taken place during my absence.'

'Monsieur Fontaine was kind enough to get the piano tuned for me,' said Catherine, 'and I asked him to let me use this room. It has such a pleasant look-out.' And still provokingly unconcerned, she put her leaves into the flower-cup, and began putting her writing things together.

'And you are not afraid, madame, of the damage which may befall this handsome furniture, for which my daughter paid so large a sum?' cried the old lady, in a voice of suppressed thunder. 'She took care of it, but you, no doubt, not having contributed anything, can afford . . .'

Catherine looked up frightened, and was shocked by the angry gleam she encountered; Madame Mérard looked stiff with indignation.

'You have, without doubt, madame, engaged servants in abundance to attend to your various wants?' the old lady went on quivering. 'We quiet people must seem to you very contemptible as you sit in your elegant drawing-room. Pray, do you intend to receive your fine friends here, in the apartment upon which my poor Léonie bestowed so much care and expense? Ah! there are only English capable of such baseness.'

Madame Mérard stopped, much satisfied, for Catherine had turned pale, and then looking round, and seeing

Fontaine standing in the doorway, the silly little thing ran up to him and burst out crying.

'Poor child!' he said, very tenderly. 'Go, go. I will explain to my good mother; she does not understand; perhaps a little *eau sucrée*. . . . Try it, *mon amie*. We will follow immediately.'

This was the first encounter between these very unequal opponents. Fontaine was so humble and affectionate that he presently brought the old lady down to breakfast almost mollified. She was really fond of him, and when he made a personal request and talked of the rest after his mental occupations, the diversion and repose the pursuit of music gave him, she reluctantly consented, with a pinch of snuff, to the innovation. It was not the only one.

At one time Madame Mérard suddenly became quite affectionate in her manners. This was soon after her arrival, when M. le Curé was a great deal at the house. He also treated Catherine with great kindness, and called her *mon enfant*. Old Mérard would dispose himself for sleep during these visits, and Monsieur le Curé and Madame Mérard would enter into long and pointed conversations upon the subject of their common faith. Monsieur le Curé would produce little brown books from his ample pockets, with the pictures of bishops, and fathers and mothers, and agonizing saints upon their narrow pallets; and from one sign and another Madame

Fontaine guessed that the time had come when it was considered fitting for her to prepare to go over to the religion of the strangers among whom she lived. She would look at the two sitting in the window, Madame Mérard taking snuff as she listened, the curé with his long brown nose, and all the little buttons down his shabby frock, and his heavy black legs crossed and his thick fingers distended as he talked. The Abbé Verdier was a gentleman, and once Catherine might have been willing to be gently converted by him to a faith which had at all times a great attraction for this little heretic; but now to be dragged over by main force, by the muscular curé, to the religion of Madame Mérard—never, never! Fontaine used to look in sometimes and retire immediately on tiptoe when the curé was there. The maire had promised before his marriage not to interfere with his wife's religious opinions—but all the same he did not wish to disturb the good work by any inopportune creaking noises. When Catherine was younger, before she had gone through a certain experience which comes to most people, her conversion might have been possible, and even likely; but now it was too late. From inner causes working silently, and from outer adverse influence, a change had come over her; she could no longer accept new beliefs and creeds, and vivid emotions which she could not even realise, they seemed so distant. She could only cling with a loving persistence to the things

of the past, which were still her own and part of her own old life.

The curé was a clever man, although bigoted, and unlike the abbé in his gentle charity and sympathy even for heretics; after a time he ceased importuning, and only snubbed Madame Fontaine; Madame Mérard scowled afresh; Justine, who had also temporarily suspended hostilities, banged her door in disgust, and took care for many weeks to iron Madame Fontaine's fine things all crooked and on the wrong side. Monsieur le Maire was grievously disappointed, but he said nothing, and only seemed, if possible, more tender, more gentle and anxious to make his wife happy.

It was on this occasion that Madame Mérard was at last relieved from another special grief which she cherished against Catherine. One Protestant impoverished Englishwoman in the family was bad enough; but the contemplated arrival of two more at Christmas, their admission into the châlet built with Léonie's money, furnished with her taste—oh, it was not to be endured! The very thought had to be chased away with much snuff, and many wavings of the big checked handkerchief. The poor little girls, however, escaped the exorcisings to which they would doubtless have been subject if they had arrived, for Lady Farebrother, taking alarm at some chance expressions in Catherine's letters, wrote in her flowing capitals to tell her that she felt she would not be

[illegible] in exposing Rosa and Totty to the insidious and [illegible] influences of Jesuitism, and that, acting upon [illegible] Bland's suggestion, she had determined to make [illegible] arrangements for the children during the holidays. [illegible] poor Catherine, her eyes filled up with bitter tears [illegible] she read the heart-broken little scrawls enclosed in her [illegible] more elaborate epistle. And yet she could scarcely [illegible] bring to see them unkindly treated. For herself [illegible] did not care. She looked upon it as an expiation [illegible] sent. Often and often she felt ashamed and [illegible] as she caught the maire's kind and admiring [illegible] So much affection and devotion deserved some [illegible] return than the grateful toleration which was [illegible] she had to give. A little patience, a few small [illegible] this was all she could pay towards that vast [illegible] owed him. As she began to love her husband a [illegible] found out how little it was. She ought never [illegible] known it. She knew it now, although at the [illegible] and excitement she had fancied [illegible] will forget where she would: love [illegible] and that by flinging away a poor faded [illegible] her all memory of the time [illegible] and sin. Alas, the wrong was done, [illegible] She could only do her best [illegible] as it lay in her power, by [illegible] the moment's weakness had

Catherine's gentleness maddened the old lady, who was afraid her victim would escape her by sheer obedience and sweetness. Why didn't she laugh and make jokes? Why didn't she get angry? Why was she so indifferent? Even when she gained four tricks running the night before, she did not seem to care. The elegant veil Fontaine presented to her might have been imitation, for all the pains she took, wearing it out in the garden with no one to see. If Catherine had only scolded and worried and complained of migraine, and lived with her husband in a way Madame Mérard could understand, she might in time have got to like her, but all this good temper was insupportable.

The time passed on. The people at Petitport heard but little from without. The Tracys were still at Paris—Charles Butler lingered still, although the poison in his system had already attacked some vital organ. It was a long sad watch for Dick. In the beginning of the winter, at Charles Butler's own request, Catherine Butler had been married quite quietly to Beamish. The news of the marriage came across the sea to Catherine Fontaine, but it all seemed very distant and hard to realise.

As the winter went on the people in the cottages lit larger fires in the deep chimneys, and huddled round the blaze. The winds seemed to shake the very foundations of the wooden house, and the maire anxiously inspected his

embankment against the expected onslaught of the early spring-tides. Outside the châlet there was cold, and drift, and storm, and low mists came rolling over the fields and along the edges of the cliffs; inside, fires of wood and charcoal were burning, stew-pots simmering on the hob, and the daily pendulum of life swang on monotonously. Old Mérard's taper burnt with a quiet flicker as he warmed himself in his chimney corner. Madame Mérard's light blazed, and hissed, and spluttered; it was not set under a bushel; nor was Justine's, as she sat below, darning away, the long winter evenings, while Fontaine busily rapped, tapped, conversed, practised his cornet, settled his accounts, came and went, cheerfully humming little snatches from operas, or with alacrity joined the inevitable *partie.* That horrible greasy pack of cards which was brought out every afternoon inspired poor Catherine with a morbid feeling of disgust that would have been absurd if she had not struggled so hard against it. When they all noisily insisted that she must join them, she would put down her book in silence and come to the table. No one noticed the weary look in her dark eyes, or would have understood it any more than did the knaves of clubs and spades, with the thumb-marks across their legs, staring at her with their goggle eyes. Sometimes thinking of other things as the hours went on, she would forget, and hold the cards so loosely that old Mérard, in his odd little piping voice, would cry out, 'Take care! take care! What are you about?' and then Catherine would start and blush,

and try to be more careful. Little Madame Fontaine's lamp, although she was somewhat dazzled by the light as she tried with a trembling, unaccustomed hand to trim the wick, was burning more brightly now perhaps than it had ever done in all her life before; and yet she might have told you (only that she found it difficult to speak), she had never thought so hardly of herself, never felt so ashamed, so sorry for all that she had done amiss. Fontaine must have sometimes had a dim suspicion that his wife was tired, as she drooped over the cards, for he would send her to the piano while he dealt the cards to the elders, and to himself, and the dummy that replaced her, to the sound of Catherine's music. The shabby kings and queens performing their nightly dance, circled round and round and in and out in the country dance which mortals call whist, and kept unconscious time to the measure. The lamp would spread its green light, the blue flames of the wood fire would sparkle and crackle, old Mérard, in his velvet cap with the long hanging tassel, would unconsciously whistle a little accompaniment to the music, as he pondered over his trumps, and Fontaine would beat time with his foot under the table; as for Madame Mérard, erect and preoccupied, she avoided as much as possible listening to the sounds which distracted her, for the flick of her cards falling upon the table was the music she loved best to hear.

One night Madame Fontaine suddenly ceased playing,

and went and looked out through the unshuttered window. Handfuls of stars were scattered in the sky. There was the sound of the distant sea washing against the bastions of the terrace. The moon had not yet risen; the narrow garden-paths glimmered in the darkness; except where two long rays of light from the window lit up every pebble and blade of grass, elsewhere shadows were heaping, and the great cliff rose black purple before the sky. Catherine looking out saw some one coming through the gloom and stop at the gate and open it, and she recognised Reine by the quick movement.

'Knave of trumps,' said Madame Mérard, triumphantly, as Madame Fontaine stepped gently out of the room and went out to meet her friend. The two women stood in the doorway talking in low tones, which seemed to suit the silence; they could scarcely see each other's faces, only Reine's white flaps streamed in the shadow; her voice shook a little as she spoke, and her hand was trembling in Catherine's soft warm fingers. Poor Reine, she had come to Catherine in a sad and troubled mood. She had received a sad hurried word from Dick to tell her all was over at last: that there was confusion and stir now in the house of which he was virtually the master. Mr. Baxter had untied his red tapes and read the will by which it was left to him. Dick was not to take actual possession for a year, during which the income was to be applied to keeping up the estate as usual, and to succession expenses.

Only a small sum was apportioned to Dick himself until he came into the property. And for the present their engagement was still to be secret. And poor Reine, in her perplexity, had written back to offer to set him free. 'He ought to marry a great lady now,' she said. It was not fitting that she should be his wife. His prospect of succession gave her no pleasure; on the contrary, it seemed to put them more widely asunder. A great house! She liked her brick-floored room better than any splendid apartment in a palace. Her cotton curtains and quilt with the stamped blue pictures from the life of Joan of Arc were more familiar to her than down and damask and quilting. Better than any carpeted flight to her was the old stone staircase leading to her bedroom, built without shelter against the outside wall of the house; she went up to bed in the rain, sometimes with the roar of the sea booming on the wind from a distance; sometimes she sat down on the steps on still nights when the stars were shining over the horizon, and thought of Richard Butler, and looked and wondered and felt at peace. But in the daylight she was unquiet and restless, she came and went, and worked harder than ever before Petitpère remonstrated with her and told her she could afford to spare herself. He did not know how things were going, but he had a shrewd suspicion. Reine said no, she could not spare herself, she must go on working for the present. And now she came half-crying to Catherine.

'I hate the secrecy,' she said: 'it is not fair upon me. If I were one of them they would not treat me so.'

Only yesterday Madame Pélottier had spoken to her in a way she could not misunderstand about people who set their caps so high that they tumbled off; some one else had laughed and asked her what she thought of Mr. Butler's great fortune; Petitpère, too, who so rarely interfered, had rubbed his old chin, and told her that he heard from Barbeau, Monsieur Richard's visits at the farm had been remarked upon. Petitpère warned Reine to be careful if she saw him again—people might chatter.

'It is my grandfather himself and Père Barbeau who chatter,' said Reine. 'They do not know what harm they do me. This morning only I met M. de Tracy and his wife. Did you not know they were come back? Catherine, they looked at me so strangely.'

Catherine laughed. 'Dear Reine, you fancy things.'

'I am ridiculous, and I know it; ridiculous as well as unhappy. Oh, if he loved me he would not make me so unhappy!'

Catherine felt a little frightened when she heard Reine say this. As a little drift upon the darkness, she seemed to see her own story—that poor little humble, hopeless love, flitting before her; and then she thought of Dick, kind and gay and loyal and unsuspecting: of his fidelity there was no doubt.

'Ah, Reine,' she said, almost involuntarily, 'he is too

kind to do anything willingly to make you unhappy. I sometimes think,' she said, speaking quickly, and frightened at her own temerity, 'that you scarcely know what a prize you have gained. Mr. Butler makes no professions, but he is true as steel; he never speaks a harsh word, nor thinks an ungenerous thought. How could he help this promise if his dying uncle asked for it? It seems so hard,' she went on, with suppressed emotion, 'to see those who have for their very own the things others would have once given their whole lives to possess, doubting, unhappy. . . .'

She stopped short: there was a sound, a window opening overhead, and Fontaine's voice cried out, 'Catherine! where are you? imprudent child.'

Catherine only answered quickly, 'Yes, mon ami, I am coming. . . .' Long afterwards she used to hear the voice calling sometimes, although at the moment she scarcely heeded it. 'Reine, you are not angry?' she said.

'Angry; no, indeed,' said Reine, her soft, pathetic tones thrilling through the darkness. 'One other thing I came to tell you. I shall go into retreat on Wednesday. Will you go up and visit Petitpère one day during my absence?'

'Oh, Reine, are you really going?' said Catherine, to whom it seemed a terrible determination.

Reine thought little of it. She had been before with her mother to the convent of the Augustines at Caen.

Impatient, sick at heart, vexed with herself, the girl longed for a few days of rest and prayer in a place where the rumours and anxieties of the world would only reach her as if from a far distance. In Reine Chrétien's class the proceeding is not common, but grand ladies not unfrequently escape in this fashion from the toil and penalty of the world. Madame Jean de Tracy herself had once retired for a few days, without much result. The nuns put up a muslin toilet-table in her cell, and made her welcome, but she left sooner than had been expected. The air disagreed with her, she said.

Marthe was now in this very convent commencing her novitiate. She had entered soon after Catherine's marriage. Jean, who had seen her, said she was looking well, and more beautiful than ever. The air did not disagree with her. Before long Madame de Tracy and Madame *mère* returned to the château, with Barbe and all the servants in deep mourning: the last sad news had reached them at Paris of Charles Butler's death. Madame de Tracy bustled down to see Catherine in her new home; she was very kind, and cried a good deal when she spoke of her brother, and asked many questions and embraced Catherine very often. She did not pay a long visit, and having fluttered off and on her many wraps, departed, desiring Madame Fontaine to be sure to come constantly to see her. Catherine was glad to go; it made a break in the monotony of her life.

CHAPTER XVII

M. AND N.

Who is the honest man?
He that does still and strongly good pursue:
To God, his neighbour, and himself most true. . . .
Who, when he is to treat
With sick folk, women, those whom passions sway,
Allows for that and keeps his constant way.

G. HERBERT.

ALL the autumn blaze of dahlias and marguerites in front of the little châlet had been put out by the wintry rains and winds, only the shutters looked as brilliantly green as ever, and the little weathercocks were twirling cheerfully upon the tall iron spikes, when Dick came walking up to the châlet one February morning about twelve o'clock. He rang the bell, Madame Mérard saw him through the dining-room window, and called to Justine to let the gentleman in.

'Monsieur was not at home,' Justine said. 'Madame Fontaine was on the terrace. Would he like to see Madame Mérard?'

Dick hastily replied that he would try and find Madame

Fontaine, and he strode off in the direction Justine indicated.

'You cannot lose your way,' she said, as she went back to her kitchen, well pleased to escape so easily, and the dining-room door opened to invite the gentleman in, just as he had disappeared round the corner of the house.

As Dick went walking down the little slopes which led from terrace to terrace, he took in at a glance the look of Catherine's life and the sound of it, the many-voiced sea with its flashing lights, the distant village on the jutting promontory, Petitport close at hand with its cheerful sounds, its market-place and echoes, the hammer of the forge, the dogs barking on the cliff, the distant crow of cocks. The sun was shining in his eyes, so that it was Toto who saw Dick first and came running up hastily from the cabane, calling to his stepmother. Then Catherine appeared with a glow upon her cheeks, for the morning air was fresh and delightful.

The two met very quietly. A gentleman in mourning took off his hat, a lady in a scarlet hood came up and held out her hand. As she did so Catherine thought she was holding out her hand across a great gulf. Heaven had been merciful to her, and she was safe, standing on the other side. Now that she saw him again she knew that she was safe. This was the moment she had secretly dreaded and trembled to contemplate, and it was not very terrible after all.

'I am sorry my husband is out,' said Catherine, after she had asked him when he had come, and heard that the Beamishes had crossed with him the day before and wanted to see her again. We all talk a sort of algebra now and then, as Catherine talked just now. The history of the past, the faith of the future, the pain, the hope, the efforts of her poor little life, its tremulous unknown quantities, were all expressed in these few common platitudes—'How do you do? I am glad to see you. My husband is not at home.'

To all of which, indeed, Dick paid but little heed, though he returned suitable answers. He was sorry to miss Fontaine, and yet he was glad to find her alone, he said. Something had vexed him, and, like Reine, he had come to Catherine for sympathy and advice. Only before he began upon his own concerns he looked at her. Now that the flush had faded he saw that Madame Fontaine was a little thin and worn; her eyes were bright as ever, but there was a touching tired look under the drooping eyelids which made him fear all was not well. And yet her manner was very sweet, cordial, and placid, like that of a happy woman. She seemed unaffectedly glad to see him, as indeed she was; and it was with an innocent womanly triumph that she felt she could welcome him in her own home for the first time. The time had come, she told herself, when she could hold out her hand and be of help to him, and show him how truly and sincerely she

was his friend. It was all she had ever dared to hope for, and the time had come at last. Perhaps if she had been less humble, less single-minded and inexperienced in the ways of the world, she might have been more conscious, more careful, more afraid; but the fresh crisp winter sun was illuminating her world; everything seemed to speak to her of hope, promise, courage, and the dead thorn had ceased to wound.

'I was told to come here to find you,' Dick said, after the first few words. 'Madame Fontaine, I want you to tell me about Reine. I cannot understand it. I have just come from the farm; they tell me she is gone into a convent, she will not be home for a week. What folly is this?'

Catherine saw he was vexed, and she tried to describe to him the state of depression and anxiety in which Reine had come to her to tell her of her resolution. . . . . 'She had no idea you were coming,' said Madame Fontaine.

'But what else could she expect?' said Dick. 'She writes a miserable letter, poor dear. She proposes to give me up; she says I am cruel, and leave her here alone to bear all sorts of injurious suspicion and insult. Of course she must have known that this would bring me, and when I come I find her gone—vanished in this absurd way. Indeed, I wrote and told her to expect me; but I see the letter unopened at the farm.' Dick, whose faults

were those of over-easiness, was now vexed and almost unreasonable. For one thing, he was angry with Reine for being unhappy. 'Why will she always doubt and torture herself in this needless way? Why should she mind the gossip of a few idiots? I want to see her, and hear from her that she does not mean all she says about throwing me over.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Madame Fontaine, 'she does not mean it.'

'It is a very little time to wait, and I could not help promising. My good old uncle has done everything for us,' Butler went on; 'she ought not to have been so oversensitive when she knew it would all be set right.'

Catherine wished he could have seen the girl; one look of her proud sweet eyes would have been more to the purpose than all her own gentle expostulations. They were walking slowly towards the house all this time, when, at a turn of the path, and coming from behind a bush, they met a short stumpy figure in a sun-bonnet. 'I have not even told my husband your secret,' Catherine was saying, and she stopped short, although she remembered afterwards that Madame Mérard spoke no English.

But Madame Mérard's little eyes could see, penetrate, transfix. Oh, it was not easy to blind Madame Mérard; she could see Catherine looking and talking earnestly to this unknown young man; she could see his expression as he replied to her appeal. Secret—surely Madame

Fontaine had said secret. Oh! it was horrible. Madame Mérard knew enough English for that. Secret! could she have heard aright?

'I do not know this gentleman,' said Madame Mérard, standing in the middle of the pathway, on her two feet, and staring blankly.

'Let me present Mr. Butler,' said Catherine gently, in French.

'Monsieur Fontaine is not at home,' said Madame Mérard, still scowling and sniffing the sea breeze.

'Mr. Butler is coming again to-morrow to see him,' said Catherine.

'Indeed,' said the old lady.

If Madame Mérard could have had her way Dick would never have entered the châlet again. What infatuation was it that prompted Madame Fontaine to ask him to dinner—to invite him—to press refreshment on him? Even old Mérard came out with some proposition. *Eau sucrée?* One would think it flowed ready-made from the sea. Happily she herself was there. No doubt her presence would prevent this young man from coming as often as he would otherwise have done. There was a secret flattery in this reflection.

But Dick was hardly out of the house when Madame Mérard began to speak her mind. Perhaps it was an English custom for young women to invite strange gentlemen to dinner in their husbands' absence. Oh, she

required no explanation. She could see quite plainly for herself, only she confessed that it was what she herself would not have done; not now at her present age. In her time a wife could devote herself to the domestic hearth. Her husband's approbation was all that she desired. Now it seemed that excitement, dissipation, admiration, were indispensable. 'Dinners in town,' said the old lady, darkly, 'music at home, expeditions, literature, correspondence, visits! . . .'

'Dear Madame Mérard,' said Catherine, 'I only go to Tracy.'

'Hon! and is not that enough?' said Madame Mérard, angrily stirring something in a saucepan (it was the tisane the devoted wife liked to administer to poor Monsieur Mérard, who secretly loathed the decoction. He was now sitting in the office to avoid the fumes). 'Tracy! that abode of vanity and frivolity! Where else would you go?'

Tracy, in truth, was the secret mainspring of all Madame Mérard's indignation and jealousy. The château had never called upon the châlet in Léonie's reign—never once. Madame Mérard herself was not invited, even now. But now since the family had returned notes and messages were for ever coming for this Englishwoman. Madame de Tracy had caught cold, Catherine must go down to see her in her bedroom. Madame de Tracy had bought a new bonnet, Catherine must give her opinion. Madame

de Tracy could not disagree with any member of her household that Madame Fontaine was not sent for to listen to the story. And in truth, Catherine was so discreet, so silent and sympathetic, that she seemed created to play the rôle of confidante. The countess really loved the little woman. Poor Catherine! she sometimes thought that she would be glad to go no more to a place where she was so much made of, and so kindly treated. It seemed hard to come home and to compare the two. One place full of welcoming words of kindness and liberality; the other, narrow, chill, confined. And yet, here she had met with truest kindness—thought the little creature—remembering all Fontaine's devotion and patient kindness. She was thinking of this now as she met the onslaught of the old lady, who went on with her attack, bombs flying, shells exploding, cannon going off, while the horrible steam of the saucepan seemed to choke and sicken the poor little enemy.

'Yes,' cried the furious old lady. 'If you loved your husband, I could forgive you all! But you do not love him, and he knows it, and his life is destroyed. You have come into this peaceful circle with a heart elsewhere. You look upon us with contempt. You scorn our simple ways. Your fine friends come and insult me, and you secretly compare us with them and their powdered lacqueys. Ah! do you imagine that we do not know it, though you are so silent? Do you imagine that Charles

is not aware of all that passes in your mind? He knows it, for I have told him. But he is loyal, and good, and tender, and he does not reproach you for having brought sorrow and disturbance into the châlet, formerly so peaceful.' And old Mérard banged the lid of the saucepan, and took a great flourish of snuff. Poor Catherine turned as pale as she had done once before, and gave a little cry and ran to the door. Fontaine was not standing there to make things smoother.

It was horrible, and what was most hard to bear was, there was some truth in the angry old woman's reproach. How much truth Madame Mérard herself did not know. Catherine could not bear the house; it seemed to stifle her, the fumes of that choking stew seemed pursuing her. She pulled a cloak over her shoulders and took up her hood, and went out. Another time she might have been less moved. But, to-day, when she had met Dick again, when all her heart had been softened and stirred by memories of past emotions, these reproaches seemed to her to have a meaning they might not have had another time. Old Mérard nodded, and called to her through the office window, but Catherine shook her head with a gentle little movement and hurried out. This was what the sight of her old love had done for her. She had been glad at the time to see him once more, but now, when she thought of Fontaine, her heart seemed to die within her. Was he unhappy, and by her fault? What a

weary maze the last few years had been! In and out, and round and about, she had wandered, hoping to go right, and coming out again and again at the same blank passage. And yet she had tried, Heaven knows she had tried, and prayed to be helped, and hoped for peace in time, and this was the end!—a good man's life embittered and destroyed,—had not his mother said so?—her own life saddened and wasted in hopeless endurance, when elsewhere, perhaps, a worthier fate might have been hers. What had she done, she thought, to be so tortured? She had got up on the cliff by this time. She was plucking the long stems of the grasses as she went along. She felt as if she, too, had been torn up by some strong hand only to be flung away. She had been mad or she would never have taken this fatal step. And yet she had hoped for a peaceful home, and she had thought that her poor little sisters at least might have found a safe refuge, and now, by her own act, they were parted from her for ever perhaps.

With small strength of her own to bear with wrongs or to assert her rights, she was apt to cling to those about her, to rely on them, to leave her fate in their hands. She wished no harm to any mortal being, she could not say a hard word, but she could fear, and shrink away, and wince and shriek with pain. The sensitive little frame could thrill with a terror and anguish unconceived by stronger and tougher organisations. It was not

of Dick she was thinking, but of Fontaine all this time, and her remorse was all the greater because her heart was so true and so full of gratitude to him. She had left her fate in the hands of others, and this was what had come of it; a poor little heart crushed and half broken, another person dragged by her fault into sorrow and remorse, a deed done which could never, never, be undone. A crime! ah, was it indeed a crime which she had committed that could never be repented of? Was there no atonement possible—no pardon—no relenting of fate?

The colours were all a-glow still, for the sun was scarcely set; the red and blue and striped petticoats, and the white caps of the fish-wives down in Petitport jumbled up into bright, pretty combinations. The creeping greys and shades gave tone and softness to the pretty scene. Indoors the fires were flaring and crackling, and presently the church bell came ringing up the street in very sweet tinkling tones, calling the villagers to the *salut*, or evening's service. The peaceful twilight prayers coming at the close of the day's work seem to sanctify to silence the busy cares of the long noisy hours—to absolve, to tranquillise before the darkness of the night.

The bell tolled on—the curé left his house and walked through his wild overgrown wilderness to the

vestry. Poor little Catherine, who had been flitting along the hedge of the great field, heard it too. She had walked till she was weary, then she had rested till her heart grew so sad that she could not sit still, and she jumped up again and walked to Arcy without stopping, and without purpose, and then came back along the cliffs and across into the fields. She was weary of pain, she felt as if she had no strength left to bear or even to suffer or to repent,—she dragged on utterly worn and dispirited, holding one or two grasses in her hand still with the grey drapery of her dress. Catherine was a delicate and orderly person, and she held up her dress with unconscious care, even when she was struggling in the Slough of Despond. It was indeed the Slough of Despond for her. A vision of the future came before her so utterly unendurable, with a struggle between right and duty and wrong for which she felt herself so unfitted, that she longed to lie down in the hard brown furrows of the field and die, and owned herself vanquished, and give up the fight and struggle no longer.

I think it was just then the bell began to toll. It seemed like a sudden sympathy and companionship and comfort to the poor thing. It turned her thoughts, it gave her some present object, for she began to walk in the direction of the church. She crossed the brook, along which the figures were coming, with the great glowing west at their backs. She turned up the quiet end of the

village, and followed M. le Curé at a distance as he led the way through the back court of the church into which the vestry opened; and the side door near the altar of St. Joseph was where the poor little heart-petition was offered up for strength and help and peace.

Catherine saw the people prostrate all about. She knew what passionate prayers some of them were praying. There was poor Thérèse Fournier, whose little girl was dying. There was Joseph Leroux, who had cruel trouble in his home; and then presently Madame Fontaine caught sight of some one kneeling on a low straw chair, and she recognised her husband, although his face was buried in his hands.

It was all very quiet and solemn. Very few of us can come in to an evening service untouched or unsoftened. To many it is but the contrast of the daylight and the candles which makes the scene impressive. But some of us must be content to be dazzled by a candle in this world, to measure the sun's light by a taper's flame. In this man's church and that man's, candles are shining at the high altar, which seem bright enough for a time: only when the service is over and the prayers are ended, shall we come out into the open air, and shall our eyes behold the fathomless waves of the mighty light of heaven.

Catherine, who was worn out and exhausted, sank into a chair in her dim corner, grateful for ease after her

pain. She was no longer feeling much: a sort of calm had come after the storm. The priest's voice ceased uttering, the choristers were silent, the service was ended, and the people rose from their knees, took up their baskets and umbrellas—one old woman slung on her *hotte* again—and they all went away. Catherine mechanically tried to escape by the side-door through which she had entered. Her chief troubles in life had come from her timidity and want of courage and trust in herself. She did not know why she was flying from her husband now; from poor Fontaine, who also had been offering up his petitions. He prayed for his mother's rheumatism; he prayed for a blessing upon his wife and child; for Catherine's conversion and happiness; for a little more calm and repose at home in the châlet; for a little gaiety even, if possible. Fontaine did not like to ask for too much at once; and though one smiles at such a simple creed, it does not seem as if a humble petition for a calm and cheerful spirit was the worst means of attaining so good a thing. The maire jumped up quickly from his knees when the service was over, and unconsciously made for the same side door through which his wife was escaping, and so it happened that the two came face to face.

'At last I find you!' he cried, as they both stepped out almost together on to the worn stone flight which led down by a few steps to the ground. Fontaine was almost inclined to believe in a miracle after all as he looked at

his wife. They were a handsome couple, Mère Nanon thought, hobbling away with her great basket on her back. They stood looking at one another in the glow of the gloaming: the breeze came salt and fresh from the sea; the twilight was warm still, with brown and fading golden tints; the silver stars were coming out overhead. 'Imagine my anxiety,' said Fontaine. 'I have been looking for you everywhere. I went home. Ma mère told me you were gone. You were not at the farm. I did not know what to do or where to search.'

'I walked to Arcy,' said Catherine, looking up with her dark wistful eyes. 'Oh, Charles, I am very unhappy.'

'Unhappy, dear!' said Fontaine.

'I am unhappy to think that through me you are unhappy,' said the poor little woman. 'Indeed and indeed I have tried to do my duty.'

'Don't talk like this,' said Fontaine. 'You are a little angel, my Catherine. What has anyone been saying to you?'

Poor little Catherine! Half in sobs, half in words, the explanation came; and with the explanation half her terrors vanished. Fontaine was a littled puzzled. She did not love him enough!—Why not? She would gladly love him more? Only now that he was so kind did she know how much he deserved to be loved. She had broken

his heart. Madame Mérard said so.—It was a bewildering story. But he began to understand it by degrees.

'Dear Catherine,' Fontaine said at last, very sensibly, 'I am many years older than you. I do not require a romantic affection: I want a good kind little wife to take a little care of me, and to like me a little. I am satisfied, more than satisfied. In my eyes there is no one to compare to you. Madame Mérard is a most excellent person, but impressionable; she does not mean always what she says. Do not be unhappy, my very dear friend: believe I am happy if you are, I ask for nothing else.'

But before they reached home Catherine had told him why it was that Madame Mérard's reproaches had stung her so sharply.

'Do you remember one night when you asked me why I threw some dead flowers into the sea?' said Catherine. 'I wanted to throw away the memory of my silly girlish fancies. Indeed it is true what I told you then—no one ever loved me but you; I have never spoken to anyone of what I am speaking now. You are the only person in all the world who cared enough for me to give me a resting place.'

Fontaine begged her to leave off. He believed her and understood her perfectly. But Catherine could not stop, and as she poured forth her story, in her agitation and emotion poor Dick's secret escaped her somehow. 'To-day Mr. Butler came to speak to me of something I

have known ever since—ever since the summer. He and Reine are going to marry one another. Sometimes they have come to me to help them. Oh, Charles, I cannot help being glad to be his friend, and to help him when I can, even though I am your wife.'

As they walked along many of the villagers wondered what Monsieur Fontaine and his wife were talking of so earnestly. They spoke of it afterwards, and Catherine, too, remembered that walk. They went along the dusky street—the little woman with dark eyes glowing beneath her scarlet hood. Fontaine looked very pale, for he was much affected by her confidence.

'I am profoundly touched,' he said, 'by the trust you repose in me. You shall see that I have entire confidence in you. The news you give me of this engagement is surprising, but not utterly unexpected. At this moment I am too much preoccupied to realise its great importance. Yes, I have implicit confidence in you, my good wife—my good little wife,' Fontaine repeated thoughtfully more than once. And so they reached the châlet at last, and entered it together, as on the night when Catherine had first come home.

Candles were alight, the dinner-table was laid, and something was simmering on the hob. It was a tisane de thé, without any milk, which Madame Mérard was preparing as a conciliation treat for her daughter-in-law. The old lady had been alarmed by her long absence ; she

thought she had gone too far, perhaps, and was sincerely glad to see Catherine come in safely with her husband.

'Coffee is good, and so is wine, and a little eau de carmes occasionally to fortify the stomach,' said old Mérard, in his little piping voice, after dinner; 'but tea is worth nothing at all.'

'Englishwomen like to destroy themselves with tea, Monsieur Mérard,' said his wife, almost graciously for her.

While the little party at the châlet that evening discussed the merits of tea and eau de carmes—while Fontaine, always kind and gentle, seemed to try in a thousand ways to show his wife how happy he was, and how he loved her, and how unfounded her terrors had been—Dick waited impatiently at the château for Reine's return. Catherine Beamish smiled and chattered and brightened them all up with her sweet spirits and happiness. She enjoyed everything, insisted upon going everywhere, charmed everyone. Ernestine was furious at being made to play a second. The very morning after all this agitation Mrs. Beamish sent a little note by the maire, who had been up there, to implore Catherine to join them immediately. They were all going sight-seeing to Bayeux, first to the museum, and then to Caen, to pay Marthe a visit in her convent; would Catherine please come too? Mrs. Beamish was longing to see her.

'I promised for you,' said Fontaine. 'I thought it

would do you good to be with your friends. Madame de Tracy says you are looking ill,' he added, looking anxiously at her.

'How kind you are to me, Charles,' cried Catherine, delighted, and looking well on an instant, as she jumped up and upset all her bobbins and reels.

Fortunately for her, Monsieur and Madame Mérard were not present. When they came in from a short stroll to the fish-market, Fontaine and Catherine had started. Toto told them that maman was going with the countess, and that she had got on her Indian shawl and her pretty rose-coloured bonnet.

'Grandmamma, do you like rose-colour?' asked Toto.

'No, no, no, my child,' said Madame Mérard, with a shudder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ABBAYE AUX DAMES.

There lofty pillars spread that branching roof,
Self-poised and scooped into ten thousand cells;
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells.

Lingering and wandering on, as loth to die,
Like thoughts, whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality.

WORDSWORTH.

MEANWHILE Catherine, in good spirits and in better heart than she had felt for many a day, was picking her way between the stones, and walking up the little village street with her husband. Fontaine nimbly advancing with neatly gaitered feet, bowed right and left to his acquaintance, stopping every now and then to enquire more particularly after this person's health or that one's interests, as was his custom. The children were at play in the little gardens in front of the cottages, the women were sitting in groups dancing their bobbins, spinning, whirring, twisting, stitching. Their tongues were wagging to the flying of their fingers and the bobbing of their white caps. Some of the men were winding string upon nails fixed to the walls, some

were mending their nets, others were talking to the women, who answered, never ceasing their work for an instant. Between the houses a faint, hazy sea showed glittering against the lime walls. Dominique, from the farm, came down the middle of the street with some horses clattering to the water; Marion and others called out a greeting to him as he passed. 'And when does Mademoiselle Chrétien return?' said Madame Potier from the door of her shop.

'Who can tell?' said Dominique, clattering away. 'To-morrow, perhaps.' He took off his hat to Monsieur Fontaine, and Madame Potier beamed a recognition as they passed.

Catherine asked her husband why so many of the men were at home. She had not been long enough by the sea to read the signs of the times in the south-west wind now blowing gently in their faces—in the haze which hid the dark rocks of the Calvados.

Fontaine adjusted his glasses and looked up at the sky, and then at the faint blue horizontal line. 'These fine mornings are often deceptive,' said he, 'although it is hard to believe in bad weather on such a day as this.' Everything was so bright and so still, the wind so gentle, that it seemed as if gales could never blow again, or storms rise. The sun poured down upon the dusty road. Now and then the threads of the women at work stirred in the soft little breeze; and voices sounded unusually distinct —a cheerful echo of life from every doorway. Presently

two men and a boy, tramping down towards the sea, passed by, carrying oars and rope-ends. These were Lefebvres, who evidently thought, like Catherine, that no storm need be apprehended when the sun shone so steadily and the sea lay so calm. The boy looked up and grinned, and his bright blue eyes gave a gleam of recognition, for he knew Madame Fontaine; one of the men, Christophe Lefebvre, touched his cap; the other, who was his cousin, tramped on doggedly. Joseph Lefebvre was the most obstinate man in the village, and no one dared remonstrate with him. Christophe and he had words that morning, it was said, about their coming expedition, but it ended in Christophe going too at Isabeau's prayer. He never refused Isabeau anything she asked, poor fellow—that was known to them all. The men went their way, and at some distance, watching them, and muttering to herself, old Nanon followed: her brown old legs trembled as she staggered along under her load of sea-weed. 'Christophe was a fool!' she said. 'What did he mean by giving in to that dolt of a Joseph?' So she passed in her turn, muttering and grumbling. Catherine would have stopped and spoken to her, but the old woman shook her head and trudged on. 'What is it to you?' she was saying. 'You have your man dry and safe upon shore, always at your side; he is not driven to go out at the peril of his life to find bread to put into your mouth.'

The old woman's words meant nothing perhaps, but

they struck Catherine with a feeling of vivid reality, for which she could hardly account. Poor souls, what a life was theirs!—a life of which the sweetest and wholesomest food must be embittered by the thought of the price which they might be called upon to pay for it some day. Yes, she had her 'man,' as Nanon called Monsieur Fontaine, and she looked at him as he walked beside her, active and brisk, and full of life and good humour. He talked away cheerfully, of tides, of fish, and fishermen, of the *École de Natation* at Bayeux, which he had attended with much interest, and where he meant Toto to go before long; he talked of the good and bad weather, storms, and of the great piles of seaweed with which the coast was sometimes covered when the tide went down after a boisterous night. 'That is a sight you must see, my very dear Catherine,' said the maire. 'People rise at the earliest dawn and come down with carts and spades, and barrows and baskets. It would amuse you to see the various expedients for carrying away the *varech* before the evening tide.'

'But what do they do with it?' said Catherine.

'It forms a most valuable manure,' said the maire, in his instructive voice. 'The odour is not agreeable, but its beneficial properties cannot be too highly commended. I remember, last spring, in the early dawn, some one tapping at my window, saying, "Get up, get up, Monsieur le Maire, the *varech* is arrived." I hastily dressed and found all the company assembled upon

the beach, although it was but three o'clock in the morning.' They had come to the church at the end of the village by this time, and Monsieur le Curé was descending the well-worn steps. He pulled off his three-cornered hat, and Fontaine, hastily stepping forward, panama in hand, returned the salutation, and asked him whether he would be at home in the course of half-an-hour? 'I have certain *paperasses* to sign,' said the maire, with a beaming and important face, 'and I venture to ask if you will kindly witness them? I will return after escorting my wife to the château,' Fontaine continued, with some slight complacence at the thought of such good company. 'She joins the niece of Madame de Tracy and others in an expedition to Bayeux.'

'We shall have rain soon,' said the curé, looking at the horizon from the church-step. 'We must make the most of this fine sunshine while it lasts.' And as he spoke the whole place seemed to grow bright.

'Joseph Lefebvre is putting out,' said the maire. 'It seems hazardous; but these people are fish, not men.' And he again adjusted his eyeglass and looked at a long low bank of clouds beyond the rocks of the Calvados.

'There will be a storm to-night,' said the curé dryly. 'Madame, however, has time to divert herself before it comes. I'm afraid Joseph will scarcely return *à sec*.'

'Monsieur le Curé,' cried Fontaine, walking off, 'I shall drop in at the presbytery on my way home.'

Catherine looked after the curé as he trudged away towards a cottage, where she, too, sometimes paid visits of charity. The black figure with its heavy skirts passed through the brilliant waves of light. This light seemed to make everything new and beautiful,—the fields, the distant lanes, the very grass along the roadside. The two, walking towards Tracy, presently reached a place where the field-path joined the road, and where one of those wayside crosses which are so common in Normandy had been erected. Some faded garlands were still hanging to it, and the grass was growing between the stone steps. Here Fontaine stopped.

'Is not that the carriage from Tracy coming to meet us?'

'Yes, I think so,' Catherine answered.

'Then I will leave you with your friends, for I have several things to do,' Fontaine said, hastily. 'Good-by, dear Catherine: they will see you home; they promised me they would if I spared you to them.'

'Good-by, Charles,' said Catherine. 'Thank you for coming with me when you were so busy.'

Fontaine smiled and kissed her forehead. 'Good-by, my little Catherine,' said he a second time, so kindly that it seemed to her that the sound of his voice echoed long after he had spoken. When the carriage drove

up, Catherine was standing quite still by the cross, watching Fontaine as he walked away. Once he turned and looked back, and then the slope of the field hid him from her eyes.

'It was not like Monsieur Fontaine to run away from us,' said Mrs. Beamish cheerfully, driving up in her furs and smiles. 'We came to meet you. My aunt changed her mind at the last moment and wouldn't come. Ernestine declares we are going to see old rags and bones, and that it is a fast day, and they won't let us into the convent. But we mean to try, don't we? Jump in, dear.'

The convent of the Augustines at Caen stands upon a hill next to the great Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, which the people call l'Abbaye aux Dames. The convent walls enclose shady lime-walks, and quadrangles, and galleries, and flights of steps, along which the white nuns go drifting. The galleries lead to sick wards and dispensaries, to refuges and nurseries. The care of the soldiers' hospital is given to the nuns, and it is almost a city which you come to within the great outer gates. Life and prayer, and work, and faith, the despairs of this world, and the emblems of the next, meet you at every step in the halls and courts and quiet gardens, in the sunshine and shadow, peopled by this pathetic multitude: men and women and children, who have fled hither for refuge. They come up from the

great battle-fields of the world, and from the narrow streets and dark tenements below. Some go to the hospital, some to the convent, and some to the little grave-yard upon the hill-side, from whence you may see the city lying in the plain, and the river shining and flowing, and the distant curve of encompassing hills painted with the faint and delicate colours of the north.

De Tracy led the two Catherines, Dick and Beamish toiling up the steep streets with their rugged stones. They crossed a lonely *place* at last, where the sun beat upon the grass-grown pavements, and no one was to be seen but some masons chipping at the great blocks of marble which were being prepared for the restoration of the cathedral. There it stood before them, high up above the town, silent, and gleaming white, and beyond it the two great gates, closed and barred, with the words HÔTEL DIEU emblazoned upon them. Reine had passed through those gates, Butler was thinking as he stood waiting with the others for the porteress to come with the key and admit them into the precincts. To Butler there was an indescribable sadness about the place. The monotonous sound of the blows from the workmen's mallets seemed to fill the air. He looked at the closed way, at the great silent cathedral, at the distant valley; some presentiment saddened and oppressed him,—none of the others felt as he did.

Catherine was in high spirits—gay in the passing excitement, thankful for relief after her pain, happy in the consciousness of her husband's trust and Butler's friendship.

As for Mrs. Beamish, everything was grist that came to her mill, she was one of those princesses who know how to grind gold out of straw. Beamish used to laugh at her energy and enthusiasm, but he loved her for it. Fossils, doubtful relics, Bishop Odo's staff, jolting omnibuses, long half-hours in waiting-rooms—Mrs. Beamish laughed and enjoyed everything untiringly.. She stood now leaning against the iron gate and holding one great bar in her hand, as she chattered on in her pleasant way, while Catherine, who had perched herself upon a block of stone, sat listening to the talk of the others. It was only woman's talk after all—of needlework, and of samplers, and of stitches, but the stitches had been set eight hundred years ago, and the seamstress was an empress, and the pattern was the pattern of her times. They had just come from the Bayeux tapestry. 'I should as soon have thought of seeing the Gordian knot,' cried Mrs. Beamish flippantly.

'Or Penelope's web,' said Dick.

'Hush!' said Beamish. 'Here comes the abbess.'

A little bright-eyed, white-robed sister, followed by an attendant in a blue cotton gown, now came to the gate and unlocked it. 'Mademoiselle will conduct you over

the hospital,' she said, in answer to their various requests and enquiries. 'You wish to see Mademoiselle Chrétien, madame? The ladies here who are in retreat admit no visits. I am sorry to refuse you, but the convent is closed to the public.' Then they asked for Marthe. It was a fast day, and as Ernestine had predicted, no strangers could be allowed to see the ladies. Any vague hopes, which might have brought Dick all the way from Petitport, were quickly extinguished by the gentle little nun, who glided away from them along the arched cloister, in and out of the shade and the light, with silent steps, like a ghost.

Then the lay sister took up the story in a cheerful, sing-song voice, and began to recite the statistics of this House Beautiful. So many loaves, so many fishes, so many doctors, so many cauldrons of soup, of physic, so many people cured, so many buried. She led them into the kitchen, where two nuns were busy cooking vegetables, while a third was sitting at a table chaunting out canticles from the Psalms, to which the others responded loudly. She led them into the long wards where the sick were lying, with their nurses coming and going from bedside to bedside; one pale man, with great dark eyes, raised himself wearily to see them go by, and then fell back again upon his pillow. The curtains of the bed next to his were drawn close, and Catherine bent her head as she hurried past it. The nursery was the prettiest and

most cheerful sight of all. It was on the ground-floor, where two or three rooms opened out upon one of the cloisters, and in these rooms were small cradles, and babies asleep, with their little fat hands warm and soft upon the pillows, and some little children playing quietly, and some old nuns keeping watch. The shadows made a shifting pattern on their woollen gowns, and the lights through the open door painted the unconscious little groups. They sat there busy, peaceful, beatified, with the children all about them, and saintly halos round about their worn old heads. They were not saints, only old women as yet. Though, indeed, it is not more difficult to imagine them as saints and angels one day yet to come, than to think of them like the children round about—young, golden-haired, round-eyed. One of the children, a little boy called Henri, took a great fancy to Dick, and trotted up to him with a sticky piece of sugar, which he silently thrust into his hand. A baby, who was sitting upon the floor, began to make a cooing noise as if to call attention, but when Mrs. Beamish stooped to take her up into her arms, she saw that the poor little thing was blind.

'Blind from her birth,' the nurse cried, 'but a little angel of goodness!'

'I think if I had not married I should have liked this life,' said Mrs. Beamish, thoughtfully. 'And you, Madame Fontaine?'

Little Catherine flushed up, and shook her head gently.

'Our sisters are very happy,' said their conductress. 'We have three who are over eighty years of age. They never come out of the convent, where they remain with the novices.'

'Do any of them ever go back into the world?' asked Beamish, in a John Bull sort of tone.

'Last year a novice came,' said the conductress; 'there was a grand ceremony at her reception. She came, dressed as a bride, in a great carriage with two horses, and many gentlemen and ladies were present to take leave of her. Then her mother came and cried, and threw herself at her feet. The unfortunate girl's courage failed; apparently hers was no real vocation. She left in a common hackney coach next morning, disgraced, and pitied by us all. . . . This is the Abbaye, which is, as you see, in reparation.'

Matilda and her successors have raised the church upon tall up-springing arches, so light, so beautiful, that they strike one like the vibrations of music as one enters. If our faith of late years had been shown by such works as these, what strange creeds and beliefs would have seemed represented by the Egyptian mausoleums, the stucco, the Grecian temples, in which we have been content to assemble. Here, through a side-door in the massive wall, they entered in among the springing forest of arches, first passing through a small outer chapel which seemed echoing with a distant chaunt, and where a coffin was

lying on the marble pavement. The lay sister quietly pointed to it, saying, 'The bearers will be presently here to take it away. It is a young man who died in the hospital two days ago. We do not know his name.' And then she opened a grating and led them into the church. They were all silent as they moved about; the whiteness and cheerfulness of the place seemed at once lovely and sad to Catherine;—she was glad to be there. 'The tomb of the empress is in the choir,' their conductress continued, 'behind that black curtain. You have seen her *tapisserie*, no doubt. I cannot take you in, for, as I told you, the service is going on, but, if you like, I may raise the curtain for an instant.'

She was quite at home and matter-of-fact. Catherine Beamish was silent and impressed; Catherine Fontaine felt as if it was a sort of allegorical vision passing before her; she could hardly believe in the reality of this calm oasis in the midst of the roaring work-a-day world: the coffin, the children, the sick people, all seemed like a dream somehow. She was thinking this when the sister called them to the grating which separated the choir from the nave, and raised the curtain, and as she did so a flood of yellow light from the west window came pouring through the bars, and then the most unreal sight of all met Catherine's eyes. It was like some vision of a saint in ecstasy. In the midst of the choir stood the great black tomb; all round about the praying nuns knelt motion-

less in their white garments. The priests at the altar were intoning in a low sing-song voice. All the faces were towards them; closed eyes, some hands clasped, some crossed devoutly, some outstretched in supplication. Catherine suddenly laid her hand on Dick's arm. 'Look!' she whispered.

'Do you see her?' he asked, eagerly, in a low voice, turning to Madame Fontaine: but the curtain fell almost at that instant and it was too late.

'No, madame,' said the lay sister decidedly, 'I must not do it again; it is impossible.'

She was deaf to all their entreaties, and stood before the pulley to prevent anyone attempting to look again.

'She saw you!' said Catherine to Butler, as they walked away at once, touched, impressed, and curious, with the sound of the chaunting in their ears. Presently the unconscious Beamish began asking them all if they had seen that beautiful young woman to the right? 'She was not so well trained as the others, and opened her eyes,' said he.

The last thing to see was the garden, where the sick people were strolling in the sunshine, and then by a great alley of lime-trees they came to the hill beyond the graveyard, from whence they could look for miles and miles at plains and hills all bathed in misty sunshine. A little wind was blowing, and smoke drifting over the gables of the town, and an odd bank of clouds seemed piled against

the west. Coming back under the bare branches of the avenue they met the little funeral procession, and stood still to let it pass. Two choristers were trudging ahead, chaunting as they hurried along; an old white-headed priest was hurrying beside the coffin. Some birds were faintly chirruping overhead, the wind came rushing through the bare branches, shaking the shadows upon the dry turf.

'It does one good to come to this place. I shall ask my husband to bring me here again,' said Catherine.

No one answered her. Butler was a little ahead, walking with his hands deep in his pockets. Catherine Beamish had got hold of her husband's arm and was talking to him. For the first time that day a strange chill presentiment came to Madame Fontaine: she remembered it afterwards. As she came out through the gates again it seemed to her as if she was leaving behind her more of peace and of prayer than were to be found outside, and yet she was glad to escape and to be carried away by the tide of life.

Who shall say where peace is to be found? George Eliot has nobly written that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and not to be found here or there by those who vainly search for it. Reine Chrétien hoped once that she had discovered it to the sound of the chaunted prayers in the companionship of sacred, indifferent women. Before coming among them she had been torn by mistrust.

Catherine's poor little warning had roused the sleeping jealousy of this strange and difficult nature. She had hated it, struggled against it, forgotten it in a passionate enthusiasm of devotion, of gratitude; and by some strange chance, praying in the choir, within the gates of the convent, she had opened her eyes to see the curtain raised, and, like a terrible revelation, the secret visions of her heart standing realized before her. There were Dick and Catherine standing outside at the grating, side by side; and within it, the nuns at their prayers, and Reine on her knees, still with a sudden tempest raging in her heart.

Another time the chance might have meant nothing, but now she was in a demoralised state of mind, and, as it often happens, the very efforts which she had made to overcome the evil seemed to increase its strength, like water poured upon the flames.

Certain combinations, which at one time, to some people, seemed utterly shifting and unmeaning, to others are, as it were, stamped and arrested for ever in their minds. A certain set of emotions have led up to them; a certain result follows. The real events of life happen silently, and in our hearts the outward images are but signs and faint reflections of its hopes, longings, failings, victories.

CHAPTER XIX.

FONTAINE TO THE RESCUE.

And the tides of the ocean wail, bursting their bars.

In the absence of his wife, poor Fontaine had been making terrible mischief at home. Madame de Tracy happened to meet him as he was coming out of the curé's house with his *paperasses*, as he called them, in his hands. She had been transacting some business with the lace-makers at the end of the village, and had walked home with him, talking of one thing and another, little thinking as she went along that this was the last of their many gossips. Madame de Tracy listened with interest to Fontaine, who was speaking of his wife, and saying how happy he was, how good she was, how charmingly she bore with the small peculiarities of a tender and excellent but over-anxious and particular mother.

'My nephew told me that he was afraid Madame Mérard had taken a great dislike to him,' said the countess, laughing. 'I know she is a little difficult at times.'

'She is a person of great experience,' said Fontaine,

'and one cannot blame her, madame, for feeling that in a usual way the acquaintance of an elegant young man of the world is not desirable for a young wife in Catherine's position. She might be tempted to draw comparisons —but of course, under the circumstances—Monsieur Butler is engaged,' and here poor Fontaine suddenly stopped short and looked Madame de Tracy in the face. . . . . 'You did not know it,' he exclaimed in despair; 'I have forgotten myself—madame, I entreat you to ask no more—let my words be buried in oblivion.'

He might have known that Madame de Tracy of all the people in the world was the last to comply with such a request. Ask no more! She asked a hundred questions, she plied him in every way. She never rested for one instant until she finally extracted poor Reine's name from her victim. Her next proceeding was to rush off to the farm in a state of indescribable agitation. Petitpère was plodding about in company with his friend Barbeau, the wisps of straw hanging from their wooden sabots. Together they poked the pigs, inspected their barns, examined the white horse's lame foot. The apparition of the countess took them by surprise, but old Chrétien courteously replied to all Madame de Tracy's agitated questions. She wanted Mademoiselle Reine. Reine was absent. She would return next day—Petitpère offered refreshment, a little bread-and-butter after her walk,—would not Madame rest? She was tired, would she not permit him to send

her home on Annette, who should be instantly saddled? Madame de Tracy fumed and fretted—refused all these well-meant offers. She could not make up her mind to explain herself to these two old men in their blouses, and finally departed, mysterious and in haste, for the weather was threatening.

Meanwhile the carriage had been waiting at the station for the little party of excursionists, and as they passed through the streets, Bayeux looked black, and then again suddenly lighted by gleams from the setting sun, the window-panes blazed here and there, drops of rain began to fall, and presently clouds came spreading and hid the pale gold, and the rain began to pour upon the roads and hedges, by the stunted fruit-trees, upon the wide fields which spread to the sea; and soon the mists came creeping up, and hid the distant glimpses of the sea and the hills.

They were all tired and silent, and spoke little on the way back. Baptiste was standing at the door of the château, when the carriage drove up through the gusts of rain. 'Madame has not yet returned from the village,' he said. 'She has sent a message; she wishes the carriage to go for her to Lefebvre's cottage. The poor wife is in great trouble; he has not yet returned. They say the boat has been seen making for the port.'

'Ah, poor woman!' said Madame Fontaine with an ache in her heart. A sudden gust of wind and rain came blowing in her face, and Baptiste staggered under the

great umbrella which he was holding over Mrs. Beamish as she alighted.

Dick had got down too, but he sprang into the carriage again when he found that De Tracy did not get off the box, but was buttoning up his coat and preparing to go on. 'Good-bye,' said Catherine Beamish, and then the carriage set off again. The horses went with a sudden swiftness, and presently they came in sight of a brown sea tossing fiercely in the twilight. Tracy stood up upon the box, and tried to make out something of the boat, but the wind blew his hat off into the carriage, and he could see nothing. The wind had changed since the morning, and was now blowing in fierce gusts from the north-west. They passed the wayside cross, upon which the wet garlands were swinging to-and-fro; the wet was dripping upon the stony steps, the mists were thickening behind it. Catherine could hardly believe that this was the sunshiny place where she had parted from her husband in the morning. Then they passed the church, and the dark-looking gates of the presbytery, over which the bushy branches were swinging and creaking; and then they came at last to Lefebvre's cottage, which stood by itself at some little distance from the street. Here Jean pulled up, but no one seemed to be there. There was the sound of an infant's voice screaming within, and at last two or three little frightened children came crowding round the door, and peeped out and ran away. 'They are

all gone to see,' one little girl said at last; the countess was gone too, she told them, in reply to Catherine's questions.

The rain fell with soaking force. The child inside the cottage went on crying in piercing sad tones, forlorn, helpless, deserted. Jean looked in. 'It is on the floor, poor little wretch,' he said.

'Please let me out,' Catherine cried suddenly; 'that poor little baby! I know it. I will wait here for Madame de Tracy, if you will tell my husband where I am, and ask him to come for me presently.'

'Had we not better take you home,' said Jean; 'how will you get back?'

'Oh, Charles does not mind the rain; it is a very little way,' Catherine said. 'I must stay with these children.'

The two young men turned and walked away, with the empty carriage following, as Catherine disappeared into the cottage. She took the wailing child into her arms, and throwing a few branches of colza upon the fire, she sat down upon a low stool, and tried to warm it and comfort it by the blaze. It was a long dark room, with the usual oaken cupboard and the deep chimney of those parts, like the chimneys in our own cottages. The wind shook the window-panes, and the slant rain struck against it as it fell; the fire seemed to make a melancholy and fitful glare, every now and then lighting up a little plaster statuette of the Virgin, ornamented with a tiny garland of

artificial flowers. The kitchen was in confusion: chairs pushed about, the spinning-shuttle lying on the floor. Catherine noticed it all when her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness; for little light came from the window, and she had asked the children to close the door. They were standing round her now, staring in amazement. One of them who had not seen her before thought it was, perhaps, a lady from heaven who had come to quiet the baby. As she hushed the wailing infant, she had taken off her bonnet, and her sweet little dark head was bent thoughtfully as one thing after another very far away from the cottage came into her mind. Every now and then the baby gave a little appealing moan; but after a time it dropped off to sleep in the folds of the cashmere shawl. Now and then Catherine would think she heard a step, and imagined it might be Fontaine coming to fetch her; but no one came for a very long time—so at least it seemed to her.

When the door did open at last it was old Nanon who appeared, slowly hobbling in from the storm outside, and staring and blinking with her odd blood-shot eyes. A little rush of sleet seemed to burst in with her, and the child set up a fresh moaning. The old woman did not seem surprised to see Catherine there.

'I came back to look to the children,' she said. If I had known you were here I should have stayed down below. They can't get the boat round the point. Isabeau

has gone to the Chapel of our Lady to pray for their safety. That child wants food.' And going to a cupboard she poured some milk into a cup, and gave it to the baby. The other children clamoured round her, but Nanon pushed them away. Then she pulled the wheel with trembling haste up to the fire, and began to spin as if from habit, mumbling and looking at the door. 'They will bring us news,' she said. 'M. le Maire is on the *plage*, and M. de Tracy and the countess. Ah, it is not the first time they have gone down. . . . Look at my wheel; there it is, forty years old. Many things have happened since it first began to turn.'

'How many thousand times it must have turned!' Catherine said.

'Ah, madame, many a time I have sat up till two o'clock in the morning to get bread to put into my children's mouths, after my poor defunct man's death. They used to cry sometimes because I had no food to give them. But M. le Curé was very good to me. "Courage, my poor girl," he said; and he made a *quête* of four francs for me. That was one day when I had nothing in the house.'

Catherine shivered as she listened to the sad voice complaining of the troubles of bygone years. She began to long to get away—to be at home. The place seemed unutterably sad. The baby was asleep by this time. She listened to the sound of the rain pattering without, of the

fire blazing fitfully, of the wheel turning. The elder children had begun a little game with a broom in a corner, and were laughing over it. Old Nanon spun on. 'Ah, what trouble I have had!' she was mumbling. 'My "petiot," he was only ten—so gentle, so obedient. Listen that I may tell you. He went out with his father and his elder brother, and about the time I was expecting them I went into a neighbour's house, and she said, "My poor Nanon, will you spin two pounds of flax?" But I said, "No, I had to repair the 'camiche' of my husband. He would want a dry one when he came home; and I was arranging a pretty little pair of sabots for my petiot." This is what Marion said to me;—"Perhaps he may never want them, my poor Nanon." And then I looked up, and I saw that more people had come in. "Qui se mouchiaient," said the old woman, in her Norman patois. And I said: "Listen to me, Marion; I like best to know the worst. I have lost my husband?" Ah, madame, it was not my husband; my husband had come safe to shore; the men of St. Laurent had saved him. But my petiot; he was holding on to his father in the water, and the cravate gave way. Ah, I have had misfortune in my time.' . . . And old Nanon went on spinning.

As the old woman was speaking, Catherine had heard steps approaching, and she looked up as the door opened, and the curé of the village came in. Catherine started up, holding the baby to her, and gave a little cry. She

seemed to guess instinctively that sorrow was at hand. The curé advanced to meet her with a face full of compassion.

'My poor child,' he said, 'come home. I have come to fetch you home. There has been an accident.'

Catherine said nothing; she could ask no question; she put the child quickly down and pulled her shawl over her head and followed him. They hurried through the wet street in the storm of sleet and wind. It seemed to Madame Fontaine that one or two people came to their doors and looked at them, but she was not sure; she did not dare to ask what had happened; she knew without being told, somehow. The curé was holding her hand and hurrying her along through the rain. As they came out upon the ascent leading to the châlet, Catherine saw a crowd of people down below upon the shingle, and some people standing in the little garden in front. 'They have got him home,' the curé said. 'Let us hurry, my poor child; there is no time to lose.'

Catherine gave a cry and put her hand to her head and began running through the rain. The people at her door made way for her; but no haste she could have made would have been of any avail.

The two young men had come upon the beach just as the other boats had been hauled up safe and dry: the men were waiting to give a helping hand to the poor Lefebvres, whose boat—*La Belle Marion*—had just

appeared through the mist. It was endeavouring to round a little promontory which jutted out into the sea beyond the terrace of the châlet, and which with the rocks at the other extremity of the village helped to form a small harbour for the fishing-boats. The name of the place came from this little natural port. There were some sunk rocks round the promontory against which the water dashed fiercely at all times. To-day the whole horizon was upheaving and tossing in the twilight. There was one faint gleam in the west where the black waves were tumbling and where clouds seemed to be shifting and tearing behind the mist, while below the terrible flushing sea was sobbing in passionate fury. Each time the boat attempted to weather the point round which it had to pass before making for the shore, the shrieking wind and the great throbbing flood-tide drove it back again and again; once a great wave came rolling from afar, gathering strength as it approached, and completely covered the poor little labouring bark.

There was a cry of terror from the poor women looking on, but the water rolled away, and the three sailors were still there, fighting for their lives upon this terrible battle-field. Two or three of the people upon the beach hurried to the little promontory of which mention has been made. There was only standing-place for two or three. Dick and Fontaine were among the number. Fontaine was very much excited; he gesti-

culated vehemently, and with the others shouted to the men; but the wind carried their voices away. The storm was at its height. The white horses were dashing against the embankment at the extremity of the maire's little garden, and the spray came washing over the promontory. The wind shrieked like a human voice. The poor little boat seemed doomed; in its efforts to get under shelter it came too near the wind, and once again entirely disappeared. It was like a miracle to the lookers on, standing helpless on the beach, to see that when it emerged a second time, bottom upwards, from the water, the three men were clinging to it still; but it only rose to be drifted rapidly past into the mist by the furious tide from the shore. It passed only some twenty yards from the sand-bank upon which they were standing—Fontaine and Dick, and the two other men.

'Good heavens! one of them is gone!' said Dick, beginning, by a sort of instinct, to fasten a rope round his waist.

Fontaine pointed to an object floating upon a wave. 'Look!' said he, 'what is that?' and as he spoke, in his excitement, he seized a rope, and dashed into the water before anyone could prevent him. Poor fellow! it was only a barrel; and as he caught at it it slipped from his grasp. There came a shriek from the wind, and a sudden squall of rain, and the rope came slack into the hand of the man who held it. 'He has let go the rope!' said one

of the men, horrified, and then, somehow, it was Dick, in his turn, who was struggling in the sea.

It was a strange and awful moment as he rose upon the great roaring wave which caught him off his feet. The sky seemed to fall to meet him, his heart stood still, chill mountains were rising and falling. At first he was quite conscious: he could even notice a long string of black seaweed pass before his face. Suddenly, sooner than he had expected, he seemed flung with a dash against some floating substance, which he clutched; the water closed over his head; and then they began to pull the rope in from the shore. He scarcely knew what he was grasping; his senses seemed to fail; stunned and bewildered, he struggled through the terrible valley of the shadow of death. When he came to himself he was lying on the shingle, some one was pouring brandy down his throat, and some one else was rubbing his hands.

Richard sat up, bewildered. They had carried him far away to a sheltered place, where they were less exposed to the storm; the sea was roaring still, but the fury of the wind had abated. As he looked, he saw that some people were carrying away the lifeless form of a man upon their shoulders; a woman with fluttering garments, and a child, sobbing in piteous tones, were trudging alongside.

'Thank God!' said Madame de Tracy, flinging her arms round Dick's neck; while Jean nodded, and put up his brandy-flask.

'You must take him home in the carriage, mamma,' said Tracy: 'and now I will go and see how it fares with my poor Fontaine.'

How it fared! He lay quite still upon his bed, with Toto still sobbing and holding his hand, and the old Mérards coming and going with scared white faces and with remedies that were not wanted now, for he would suffer no more. Some terrible blow in the water had stunned him to death. It was no living man that poor Dick had brought to shore. Poor Fontaine had been dashed by the storm against the barrel or some sunken rock.

Dear simple heart! So foolish, so absurd, so confident, so tender and thoughtful for others. 'He could swim like a fish,' he had said to some one. 'It was not for him to remain behind when others were going to their deaths.' Ridicule is hushed, the humble are crowned with good things, when the solemn wave which cast Fontaine upon the unknown shore comes for each in turn. Some of those who had laughed at his odd kindly ways were waiting outside in the rain with eyes full of tears;—some who had prayed more fervently, felt more deeply, perhaps realised the solemn mysteries of life and death more vividly, than this simple soul, were awe-stricken and silent as they thought of him now, for he was wiser than they. Love thy neighbour as thyself is the divine law of life, and if ever man fulfilled it cheerfully, unpretendingly, it was

Fontaine. He had done his task gaily, kindly, ungrudgingly; he had gone his way, and died in harness.

Madame de Tracy awoke from troubled sleep in great agitation and depression on the morning after the storm. She could not rest: her nerves had been greatly shaken by the terrible calamity of the day before, by the sight of the poor little widow's terror and anguish. The good châtelaine longed to be of use to her, but Catherine had begged her to go, to leave her alone.

Poor lady! all night long she had wondered, reproached herself, sorrowed for her friend. She had had her will, she had made up a match, and this was the end of it. Madame de Tracy rose at last from her uneasy bed, where the little sharp points of conscience were piercing the down and the elastic mattresses; she went to one of the windows, and opened it, and looked out. From this window she could see the châlet far away, and a bit of the sea and of the beach, upon which a light was burning, and she saw that the shingle was quite black with the seaweed which the night's storm had cast up. The châlet looked very still; no one seemed moving, but presently from one of its upper windows there came a light.

Madame de Tracy looked at it with a pain aching and tugging at her kind old heart; she waited for a while, and then rang for Barbe, who appeared presently, bright and smiling, with white cap-strings flying, as if it had been

five o'clock in the afternoon instead of in the morning. 'Barbe, go to Mr. Richard's door and ask him how he feels.'

'Madame, he is asleep,' said Barbe; 'his door was open as I passed.'

'Asleep! ah, perhaps it is the best thing for him. Tell me, is anyone stirring in the house?'

'I think, madame, that M. le Comte is rising.'

'Barbe, go and knock gently at his door. Ah, no; prepare my dressing things and a small cup of coffee, and one also for yourself. I want you to come with me to the châlet. I must go and see after that poor child. Ah, what a terrible scene! I little thought when they sent for me . . .'

When Barbe and her mistress reached the village it was all alive with early voices. The morning after the storm had broken with brilliant sunshine, although great mountains of clouds still hung mid-air. The doors were open, the people busily coming and going, children half-dressed were peeping, the early plants in the gardens were bathed in brightness. Even Madame Potier was at her unopened shop. She stared at Madame de Tracy, who, for the first time for many years, appeared in public with her frizzy curls.

'You have heard the news, madame?' she cried. 'They came back in the night. They managed to get on shore at St. Laurent! It is a miracle.' From the steep ascent to the châlet Madame de Tracy could see the figures

crowding down below like ants, to clear away the great piles of black seaweed, and gather the harvest which the storm had cast up upon the shore. Nanon had her *hotte* full of the long hanging fringes: carts heaped with the fluttering ribbons slowly rolled away. Poor Catherine, too, saw the sight, looking out at early dawn, and languidly wondering what the bright lights moving here and there upon the beach could mean. Were they watching as she was? It seemed to her like a great pall cast up out of the sea, and she turned away with a sickening pang and a groan. She was afraid she had awakened Toto, who was lying asleep in a great chair, but the poor child only stirred uneasily, and breathed gently to sleep again.

About mid-day the storm came on again with so much fury that they were obliged to close the shutters of the châlet, and burn candles all day long. On the third day it abated, and poor Fontaine was laid in his grave.

On the day of the funeral Catherine saw the little feather brush which had vexed her so often lying on a table. She caught it up, the poor little widow in her long black dress, and covered it with kisses and tears. Tears of such tender love and longing and remorse; no hero of romance, no knight dying in tournament, could have inspired truer and more tender sorrow.

On the third day after the storm Reine came walking quietly across the fields from the station, wrapping her

cloak round about her, for the evening was chill. Everything looked dusky, silent; low pale lights were shining through the broken heaps of clouds that were, at last, dispersing in the west. The salt pool under the dark bushes at the end of the road was gleaming with these pale lights. The horses in the fields were moving here and there, scarcely distinguishable in the darkness. Just over the farm, where the clouds had not risen, a little bit of red moon was hanging. The lights were pale chilly gold; but some deep shadows were heaping against the faint background. The windows of the farm were lighted up warmly, and looked home-like and welcoming to the young mistress of the house as she reached the great arch and went in.

She thought her own home had never looked so home-like, with its friendly seamed face, and quaint yet familiar aspect. She had a feeling as of a living friend or spirit of the hearth welcoming her, and enclosing her within open arms. She was glad to come back to liberty, to daily work, glad to meet her grandfather,—glad to meet Dick once more. But something—a presentiment, perhaps, growing out of the feelings of the last few days—seemed to mix with the happiness which she felt. It was like a little bitter taste, a little passing fear,—like a small cloud no bigger than a man's hand rising out of the horizon.

We all know how strangely, as we travel on in life, we suddenly reach new countries, states of mind, and of being,

undreamt of, or at least unrealised by us. Those terrible phantoms of our youth—the selves to be of the future—come silently upon us before we are aware, whispering secrets to us which we have not suspected, telling us truths that we sometimes hate to hear, sometimes thank heaven with unspeakable relief for knowing at last. There had been a strange revelation to Reine in that sudden withdrawing of the curtain of the chapel. She had seen, as it were, the thoughts, the unexpressed anxieties of her secret heart, in flesh and blood there actually represented before her. The sight might have meant nothing if it had not been for the feelings which had preceded it: Dick at his ease among those rustling silks and furs; Catherine there, and, as it were, one of them. What had Reine in common with it all? Nothing, ah, nothing but her great love. So great it was that she sometimes felt alone in it: her love, which was as a pain and a burden to her, for she could not express it. It was scarcely a part of herself, she thought sometimes. It seemed to her like something from without, bearing down upon her from a great distance. She could only offer it up with terror and awe, in solemn sacrifice to an unknown God. Alas! poor woman, these great silent emotions are not the offerings which are accepted most willingly in this good-humoured world. Thousands of little affectionate fires are burning on our neatly-blackened hearths, in our kitchens, in our hospitals and refuges. We deal out our fuel in scuttlefuls, and put

in a few sticks of sentiment if the flame is very low; but I think Reine would have lighted a great pile, if she could have heaped upon it all the most worthy and valuable things; flung into it all the rich flowers, sweet fruit, and a few bitter herbs and incense, set fire to it all, and walked herself into the flames, had she seen the occasion. Reine, with all her defects and her tenderness, her jealousy, her fidelity, her passionate emotions, her angry, rough words, could speak of the small passing feelings of an instant; but it was so hard to her to put words to the great harmonious discords of her secret heart, that she rarely tried to do so. It was in the look of her eyes, the flush of her face, its sometimes tender brilliance of anger and sweetness, that Richard Butler could read her heart.

Although Reine was old for her years in feeling, she was young in the knowledge of the world, and many a child of thirteen is wiser than she was then. It is only as women grow older and know more of life that they escape from the Rhadamanthine adoration which haunts their inexperience. They find out later how fallible all human judgments are—how unsatisfactory and incomplete—and they discover, when it is too late sometimes, that the tall superior beings who are to take the calm direction of their poor little flustered souls are myths and impossibilities.

The girl walked across the court with the heavy deliberate footstep of the Chrétiens. The ladies of the

d'Argouges family, her mother's ancestors, had not been in the habit of wearing such heavy leather shoes; but one of them, Jeanne d'Argouges, had once been painted in a peasant dress with the same old golden crucifix hanging round her neck that Reine now wore. She used to be called 'La Fée,' and the girl had often heard her mother tell the story of her sad end, and how she died of a cruel word. Reine was like the picture, poor Madame Chrétien had thought, and she had been used to laugh and say that perhaps her daughter's beauty came to her from the drop of fairy blood in her veins.

As she came in, Petitpère, who was sitting by the fire, looked up and smiled at her, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

CHAPTER XX.

NEVER, NEVER.

As it was better youth
Should strive through acts uncouth
Towards making, than repose on aught found made,
So, better, age exempt
From strife should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age—wait death: be not afraid.

PETITPÈRE looked up and smiled, and shook his head a moment after, as he began the recital of all that had befallen them since Reine had been away. It was too true that sad and terrible things had happened, and yet tobacco and gossip were not the less sweet because storms had raged and misfortunes thickened; and the old fellow puffed his pipe, and leisurely recounted his story. 'He! poor boy, who would have thought it?' said old Chrétien, as he finished the little tragedy. 'He ought to be alive at this moment, and there he was in the cimetière, whilst two old fellows were still in their sabots.' Strangely enough, poor Fontaine had signed his will that very morning, in the presence of M. le Curé and his gardener, so Barbeau reported. It was not known for certain, but it

was said that he had left everything to his widow for her life, and appointed her sole guardian to his boy. Poor little woman! it was a rude shock for her. People talked of her return to England. Then Père Chrétien went on to other things. The white cow was ill—it had been hurt in the nostril; Barbeau had examined the wound, he thought badly of it; and, by the way, what was the matter with Madame la Comtesse? She had been up at the farm, asking all manner of questions, ferreting here and everywhere. 'She didn't discover much,' said old Chrétien, with a chuckle; 'but take care, my girl: she looked malicious; I could see it plain enough. Barbeau, too, had commented upon the circumstance. They don't like the Englishman to come too often, that is not hard to divine. Only this morning I had to send him off very short,' said Petitpère complacently. 'That sort of person it comes, and goes, and amuses itself, and thinks itself of consequence. As for that, he might have broken his head in the sea in the place of poor Fontaine for all anybody cared. Voilà!' the old fellow concluded philosophically, 'Barbeau says there is no depending. . . .'

'Oh, don't, don't, Petitpère,' cried poor Reine, flinging herself down upon the oak bench against the wall, and beginning to cry. 'Poor Fontaine, poor friend, poor Catherine! Oh, what a sad world! Oh, how bitter was life!' she cried, in her pathetic voice, hiding her face in her

hands, while the sobs came faster and faster. 'Fontaine dead! that kind creature, so alive, so full of gentleness and goodness.'

Poor soul, was it only for Fontaine that she was mourning, or did her tears flow for all sad hearts, all future troubles, all possible separation?

She was sitting there still; the old man had put down his pipe, and was patting her on the shoulder with his horny old fingers, and doing his best to console her.

'Now then, now then,' said he, 'you are not *his* widow, to give way to desolation like this. Hush! there is some one coming. It is perhaps Barbeau. . . .'

But even the hated name of Barbeau did not rouse poor Reine as did the step upon the tiled floor of the kitchen and the voice which gladly exclaimed and called her by her name, and then the sweet tear-stained face looked up, and the pathetic eyes met Dick's proud glad glance. For a minute Reine forgot all her doubts, jealousy, hard resolves—forgot everything but Dick for a minute, as he stood before her, holding both her hands in his, and then he spoke:

'You have been badly wanted, dear Reine. I have come for you. I promised that poor little woman to bring you back to her. I knew I should find you this time . . .'

Why did he speak? Ah, why, if this was all he had to say? The tender heart seemed suddenly to grow hard

and rough, the light died out of the wistful eyes. Why did he speak, if his first words were to be of Catherine? It was in vain that the girl tried to hush the devilish voice, to put the hateful thought away. Reine stood, with dry eyes and a pale face, glancing from Dick to Petitpère, who was once again sitting doubled up over the fire, shaking his head doubtfully to himself every now and then.

'Could you come now?' Dick persisted.

'Not to-night, sir,' interrupted old Chrétien, without looking round. 'Reine is tired, and has come from far. To-morrow she will visit the poor lady.'

'Where is she?' Reine asked, in an odd, indifferent voice, beginning to tie on her cloak. Petitpère shrugged his shoulders. Did he not know by this time that it was useless to attempt to control her? In a minute more Reine and Butler were crossing the dark court-yard together.

'I shall send Dominique after you with the cart,' cried Petitpère, coming to the door. 'Reine, you would have done better to stay.'

They came out into the wide open plain. There were rolling mists, clouds, sudden winds; darkness was descending like a veil. The two went side by side through wreathing vapours; they scarcely broke the silence. For a minute Petitpère watched their dusky figures, which were hardly perceptible as they crossed the

road, and struck across the fields. Reine, walking along beside her lover, tried to put away all thought that was not of the present. Of a present that to others might seem dark and doubtful and chill, and yet which to them both was vibrating with an unconscious and unspeakable delight, for were they not walking together through the darkness? And yet at the same time they were both doubting whether it was a reality that made them happy, or only a semblance of what might have been true once.

Alas, Reine was not strong enough to forbid sad thoughts of the future to come between them. She was so strange, so reserved, at once so agitated, and so unmoved, that Butler, who had been looking forward all through his long sick watch to this happy meeting, was disappointed, wounded, and pained. When Catherine had sent for him, and begged him to bring her friend, it was not of this Reine he had been thinking, but of another, tender and full of sympathy. This one was so sad and so cold that she seemed to freeze him over and sadden him, and all the while she, poor soul, was aching and sickening for the loving words, the tender reassurances she had longed and hoped to hear. It was in vain Dick tried to extort the sympathy from her he wanted. She would not, could not respond. Reine was for the moment wondering who might be most to be pitied if—if

——She interrupted him once when he was speaking of Catherine.

'Do you know that Madame de Tracy was up at the farm yesterday? She asked my grandfather a great many questions. Can she suspect truth! Can Madame Fontaine have told her? . . . .'

'I am sure she guesses the real state of the case,' Dick said; 'but Catherine Fontaine has not told her! Poor little woman! she has other things to think of just now.'

'Is she very unhappy?'

'How can you ask? Should not you be unhappy if I had been drowned instead of Fontaine?'

The girl shivered, and then suddenly, with a passionate movement, drew her hand from his arm, and almost pushed him away.

'I am not married to you!' she said, bitterly and furiously; 'perhaps if I were only your widow, I could bear to part from you. Widows recover and marry again . . .'

'Hush, Reine,' said Dick, angrily.

'Why do you mind my saying this?' persisted the girl, in her rough grating voice.

'Because it is not like you to show no sympathy for some one in great sorrow. I think you must be already sorry for what you have said,' the young man answered, gravely.

The girl did not speak, except, indeed, by a strange and wistful look, and walked on by his side in silence.

I have no excuse to make for Reine Chrétien, nor do I want to make one for her. With all her faults, her pride, her waywardness, there was a noble truth and devotion in her nature that spoke for itself, and forced you to forgive, even while you were vexed still and angry. The two walked on for a long way. For once evil and good were urging her in the same direction. Her jealousy was helping her to fulfil what she had grown to look upon as a duty.

Ah me! how often it happens in life that the generous self, the passionate great heart, unconscious, or perhaps ashamed of its own tenderness and nobility, takes, in self-defence, small means to accomplish great ends. Reine was one of those who, in a generous fashion, would swallow a camel and strain at a gnat. We have all of us been blinded and ungrateful in our life, at one time or another, unconsciously accepting together the great sacrifice and the small one, grudgingly granted; we have all complained, perhaps, of the vexing word, the passing caprice of a moment, unconscious—ah! for ever unconscious of the whole world of love, of sacrifice, of utter devotion, which was ours just then to forget, to ignore, to accept without thanks, to abandon, if we would, scarcely heeded.

They had reached the gate of the châlet by this time; the moonlight seemed to be streaming everywhere.

'Oh, Richard, Richard, do you mean to tell me you do not know that she has always loved you?' cried Reine, with a sudden burst, as she left him, and went in.

The poor little châlet, with all its absurd ornamentations and whirling flags and weathercocks, looked so sad and forlorn, so black and hearselike in the darkness. The blinds of some of the windows were down: a pale light shone in Catherine's window, as well as from the glass-door of the kitchen down below. Dick, pacing up and down outside in the moonlight, looked up more than once, and laughed a little bitterly to himself over the perversity of women. He did not like Reine the better for her jealousy. It was not worthy of her, he thought. Except for these two lights, the house was very dark and silent, within and without. Monsieur and Madame Mérard had gone away for a few days, Madame Binaud had come for them, and Catherine had piteously begged them to go, to leave her with Toto. She was only longing for silence and rest.

Poor old Mérard's little piping voice quavered when he came to say good-by, and his jolly face seemed circled with dark round wrinkles which had not been there before. 'Pauvre petite!' said he, kissing the two little cold clinging hands which he held in his. Madame Mérard, too, seemed changed and greatly shaken. She said little, but trotted about, overturning drawers, and keeping vigilant watch over the goings-on in the house. Just before starting,

she carried up a cup of strong broth to Catherine, which she had made with her own hand. 'Drink it down hot,' said she. 'There is a good pound of meat in it, for I arranged it myself.'

Dick would not have thought Reine hard or perverse could he have seen into the room from where the faint ray of light was streaming, and where poor little Catherine was sitting on a low chair by the smouldering fire, while Reine knelt beside her, holding her hand in a tender clasp. Reine had that strange gift of healing and comfort which some people possess; there was strength and peace in the touch of her strong gentle hands, and in the wise wistful look of her eyes. Catherine spoke a few broken words, telling her how it had happened, speaking of Dick's courage and devotion. Reine listened, gazing into the fire, keeping time with her heart to Richard's footsteps outside—it was long, long before she listened to them again—the clock ticked monotonously, and time went on.

And then they heard a voice speaking down below. 'Justine, do not let Mademoiselle Chrétien go without seeing me,' said somebody.

'It is Madame de Tracy,' said Catherine, languidly. 'She has been here all day.'

It was Madame de Tracy's voice; it was Madame de Tracy herself who had just arrived, and who stood waiting in ambush down below—waiting in agitation, palpitation, and excitement, expecting her prey, not without some

alarm, poor lady. Justine the cynical saw that something was going on. It did not concern her; she only shrugged her shoulders as she plodded about the house from one creaking wooden room to another. She was putting away the linen in the maire's little office, which was now at last disponible. It was convenient and near the kitchen—she had always wanted the place for her tablecloths. Coming downstairs with an armful of linen, she met Reine leaving Catherine's room. 'You are wanted in the kitchen,' said she. 'Madame de Tracy certainly will not let you go without seeing her.' And as she spoke Madame de Tracy, with her bonnet all on one side, came out at the sound of the voices, and held open the door with much dignity.

'I have to speak to you. Come in here, if you please. My nephew is outside, but it is to you, mademoiselle, I address myself. He is waiting for you—do not deny it; I know all, everything.' And the countess blazed round upon the peasant-girl, who, however, seemed but little discomposed by the attack. 'Ah, mademoiselle,' continued Madame de Tracy, suddenly changing from ferocity to supplication. 'If you do really care for that foolish, impetuous boy, you will forgive me and sympathise with me when I implore you to reflect upon the sacrifice he is making—a sacrifice that will disgrace him, and drag him down in the eyes of the world. It is so hard in its judgments. Is that door securely closed? I would not for the

world that Justine should overhear, that Dick should suspect me of influencing you. He was furious once not long ago, when I foolishly dreaded another attraction, but this would be still less . . . . still more—Catherine at least was . . . . .' The poor lady stopped short, embarrassed, unable to finish her sentence. Well she might be, for she caught sight of Reine's indignant cheeks burning, and of the much-dreaded Dick himself coming in through the glass-door. A chill night-wind surged in as he opened the door, of which the shutters had not yet been closed. He had kept out of his aunt's way when she arrived, and had been quietly walking outside up and down, biding his time. It had come now; and now Dick guessed in an instant what had happened. He went straight up to Reine, and pnt his arm round her, as if to defend her, and yet Reine was strong enough to defy the poor trembling, agitated lady, without his assistance.

'You musn't say anything to Reine, aunt Matilda, that you wouldn't say to me,' said Dick, haughtily.

'Dear boy!' cried Madame de Tracy, more and more fluttered and anxious, 'indeed and indeed I only speak for your good and hers. Of course you have passed your word; but you do not know the world as I do, nor to what you are exposing . . . . you—you . . . .'

'Hush!' said Dick, speaking savagely, almost for the first time in his life. 'Reine and I understand one another very well, and are quite willing to put up with any

inconvenience;' and his voice softened: he looked at the girl with a smile. But she did not answer; she was quite pale, and her eyes were on fire. She drew herself up to her full length, and stood there in the moonlight in her country-dress, looking like a wraith. Even her words sounded faint and toneless.

'Heaven knows,' she said quietly, 'that I am ready to die for you, Richard, but I will never marry you—never, never! It is not for the first time that I hear these things, that I reflect upon the sacrifice you make, upon the danger of marriage ill-assorted and unhappy. Nothing will ever change my affection; you are part of my life, of my prayers, ever since I first knew you.' . . . The passionate cadence of her voice broke into a sob. Reine spoke with emotion, feeling that she was safe in Madame de Tracy's agitated presence; she imagined Richard would say nothing, do nothing, but somehow she was mistaken, and she found herself folded in the young man's arms.

'My Reine,' he said, 'I want no words—I understand.' But the girl put herself quickly away out of his embrace. What strange love-parting was this in the sad house of mourning!

'You do not understand me,' cried Reine; 'and you, madame, need not be so much afraid of the harm I shall do him,' she said passionately, turning to Madame de Tracy. 'I shall not drag him down; I shall not force him to keep his word; I shall not disgrace him!'

The girl's anger and sorrow had gradually reached a hysterical and almost uncontrollable point. The things Madame de Tracy had glibly explained, meaning no harm, poor lady, had nearly maddened her. Her allusion to Catherine was the last drop in the brimming cup. In vain Dick tried to calm and to soothe her. She did not listen; she would not look at him even; for a minute she stared through the glass-door into the moonlight without, and then at Madame de Tracy, agitated, inarticulate, and fleckered by the blaze of the fire.

'Catherine, of whom you spoke just now,' cried the girl, 'would have been a thousand thousand times more suited than I should ever be. Ah! do not interfere again, madame. You do not know what you are doing!' And with a scared sort of look Reine suddenly broke away from Dick, and pushed at the glass-door, and ran out into the night. She had forgotten all about Dominique and the cart, but she found them waiting at the garden-gate. Dick, following an instant after, only came in time to see her drive away.

I think if he had caught her then—if he had scolded and then forgiven her—all would have been right between them then; but the horse set off at a trot down the hill. The cart rolled away with a dull jolt of wheels over the sodden earth; mists came between them and distance greater and greater. Butler was too angry and hurt to follow her at the time,—more angry, I think, because she

went off in the cart than for all she had said to vex him.

'Never, never.' Did some one whisper it in his ear? What a strange creature—lovely, womanly, tender, and pathetic, and furious; how hard to satisfy, how difficult to love, how impossible not to love!

Dick spent a sulky evening at the château, smoking by himself in the smoking-room, while Madame de Tracy retired with fluttering dignity to her own apartment. Jean thought it a bad business; but it was his maxim not to interfere. It was no affair of his. Dick was old enough to attend to his own concerns; and though Mrs. Beamish and Ernestine went down upon their knees to him, they could not prevent him from thinking that there was but one woman in the world, and her name was Reine Chrétien.

Dick made up his mind very quietly, without asking any one's leave. He was a little touched, and very much provoked, by the allusions to poor Madame Fontaine; but he hoped there was some mistake, and rather avoided dwelling upon that part of the subject. Reine had been jealous, as women are sometimes. He walked up to the farm before breakfast. The fine weather had come at last; fields and furrows were twinkling with early dew; a thousand lights and crystals and refractions were shining out of the earth; a cheerful sound of labour echoed under the dazzling morning vault. Old Chrétien was sitting on the bench

sunning himself outside the great archway in his blue smock; the queer old pinnacles, and chimney stacks, and pigeon cotes were all distinct against the clear heaven, and the two tall poplar-trees on the roadside showed every twig and spray full with the coming leaves. Paris came to meet Dick, shaking his lazy long body and wagging his tail. Petitpère sat staring at the field where his men were busy digging up vegetables and loading a cart.

'Good-morning,' cried Dick, cheerfully. 'Monsieur Chrétien, where shall I find your granddaughter?'

'That is more than I can tell you,' said the old fellow, looking utterly vacant and stupid. 'Reine is gone, and I am busy enough in her absence. As monsieur sees, I am getting in my vegetables.' And he pointed to the field where they were growing, and where the labourers were busy digging up the earth. It was the field which the lovers had crossed in the darkness the night before.

'Gone?' said Dick, looking at the field, without seeing anything before him.

'She is gone back to the convent,' the old man said. 'I should not like it for myself; but she finds her pleasure there.'

'Did she leave no letter, no message for me?' Richard asked, trying to light a cigar, though his fingers were trembling as he did so. Petitpère gazed stupidly at the young man.

'I was to let her know as soon as you were gone, that

she might come back and see to the fatting of the pigs,' said he; 'that was what she said.'

With a sudden movement, Dick threw the unlighted cigar away over the hedge.

'She need not delay her return on my account,' said Butler, flushing up, and turning his back to Petitpère. 'I shall leave the place to-day for good. Pray tell her so when she comes back to—to her pigs.'

Old Petitpère shrugged his shoulders for the last time in this little history, and rubbed his old knees, pleased with the effect of that parting shaft: and yet he was a little sorry, too, for the young fellow, as he went swinging angrily along the road, and disappeared at the turn by the willow-trees.

Dick was far away safe among the green pasture and cool waters of Lambswold, and Reine might have come back from her convent without fear of meeting him; but many and many a day went by before the girl returned to the farm-kitchen, to her accustomed ways and works; and when she came, it was a wan and weak and weary woman, recovering from an illness through which the good nuns had nursed her. Poor Reine! she came back to Petitpère and the pigs and the cows for companionship and sympathy. She could not think of the past—it filled her with such doubt and remorse; she did not dare to contemplate the future, it seemed so endless, so grey, so unbearable; she would not have been sorry to die in the convent, in the

sunny ward among the tranquil nuns, and so to solve the difficulty and riddle of her life. But it was only a low nervous fever from which she had suffered, and she knew that there was no chance of any end to it, but that prosaic end of getting well and going home to her dull and neglected duties. If Catherine had been at Petitport she would have found comfort and happiness with the tender little woman. But a chance had happened, which would have been stranger if it had happened sooner, and Catherine was away in England with her sisters, looking after some property which had come to her and to them. What did she want with it now? Fontaine had provided for her, and she liked better to owe ease and comfort to him, to his care and his tender thought for her, than to a chance by which Lady Farebrother had died before she could sign her name to a will. Mr. Bland would have been a good many thousand pounds the richer if the poor lady had lived a few hours longer. He never had even the satisfaction of knowing it; for, though both the doctor and lawyer were sent for, they both came too late. As it was, Catherine's two little sisters came in for no inconsiderable portion of their aunt's possession, and a certain sum was left to Catherine, their guardian, by their mother's will.

It was in autumn this year, after poor Fontaine's death, that I stayed at Petitport, and first made Reine

Chrétien's acquaintance on the sea-shore, as I described in the beginning of my little history. These were not prosperous times. There was a great deal of sickness in the village, the harvest had failed, and wherever I went I heard complaints and witnessed pain and suffering. Reine seemed to be everywhere, helping and tending her poorer neighbours. It is impossible not to believe that some people have an unexplained power, which must be magnetic of its kind, for healing and soothing pain. Reine possessed this odd influence over the sick, and was conscious of it although she could not account for it; she unfortunately had full opportunity for exercising her gift. Fever and famine were common enough in the poor little village; these two grim visitors were almost as certain to come in their season as the bathers and holiday-makers with the summer and sunshine. This year fell unusually heavy upon the little population; there was hardly a family that had not some member stricken with the fever. Reine herself lost her grandfather soon before I came to the village. For some time she was living by herself in a great empty farmhouse on a hill. When I knew her first she seemed to take to me, perhaps because I was English, perhaps because I happened to know something of the people she most cared for, partly because I was fascinated by her. After that day on the sands I went up to see her once or twice at the farm. A widow woman was living

with her, a certain Madame Marteau, to whose little daughter she was greatly attached.

Poor Reine! these were hard times for her. On the very day I first made her acquaintance she had heard a report from Justine at the châlet concerning Catherine, which had stirred up many a feeling still fresh and vivid, though she scarcely believed the report. Sometimes she spoke of the past, but with evident pain and shrinking and doubt and remorse. Had she done right? Had she done wrong? She seemed to be sure of nothing but of the love which was in her.

Once, only once, she sat down to write to him. She never meant to send the letter, but it was a relief to her to put down upon paper all that was in her heart—all her loving remembrance—to write the words of benediction, although he might never need her blessing now. When she had written the tender little scrawl, she burnt it; but the words were somewhere, everywhere she thought, as she saw the cinders float away. She said to herself that no fire could burn them out, nothing could destroy them; in some distant world, if not in this one, they would find him.

CHAPTER LAST.

'TURN, FORTUNE, TURN THY WHEEL.'

ONE day Reine, walking down the village street, met Madame Mérard coming from the châlet, where she had been superintending some packing and re-ordering. The old lady was trotting heavily along, with a large packet on her arm. She was panting fiercely, in a state of fume and of excitement. No wonder. 'She had heard an announcement,' she said, 'which she had always predicted—always. What else was to be expected of a young woman so entirely engrossed by society and amusement as Madame Fontaine had always shown herself?' Madame Mérard declined to give her authority for the news she had heard. 'Hon! time would prove the truth of her assertions. Well-informed and dispassionate persons had assured her that Catherine Fontaine was on the eve of contracting a second and highly advantageous alliance with Mr. Butler. In that event the châlet and all the elegant fittings would return to Toto. Most providentially a clause to that effect had been inserted in the will, at the curé's suggestion; for the poor infatuated Charles would never have

shown this necessary prevision. Poor man, already forgotten! Ah, how differently she, Madame Mérard, had acted under similar circumstances. Although assiduously pressed, within six months of her widowhood, to make up her mind, by no less than three different gentlemen, in no wise connected with one another, she had refused to give any answer whatever for a space of two whole years, during which their attentions had been unremitting. At the end of that time, having made Monsieur Mérard's acquaintance, she had dismissed the other aspirants with every mark of esteem and consideration. Now-a-days things were different. Do not seek for disinterested affection. Oh, no,' said Madame Mérard, 'for it would be no use.' And the old lady stumped away at her quickest pace up the road, and across the field; she had business at the château, she vaguely intimated, snorting and shaking her head. In truth, her authority was only that of Justine at the châlet, who had heard the news from Baptiste at the château, who had it in a letter from Barbe, now in England with her mistress; and Madame Mérard was anxious to gather every particular.

Poor Reine did not take so much pains to verify the news. She had heard some such report before, that seemed corroborated now. It was natural, and only what she had expected all along. The blow had fallen at last. Amen. She knotted her two hands together, and walked along erect and abstracted, with eyes that seemed looking

at a far-off distance, silent, with a passionate cry in her heart. She walked on to the little village grave-yard on the road-side, behind the iron railing where her mother was lying, and Petitpère resting under the poplar-tree, and where in a sunny corner Fontaine's name was carved upon the stone cross which Catherine had put up to his memory, and over which the ivy was creeping.

The struggle which came to Reine then was that sore one which comes to each one of us, at one time or another, when passionate hopes die away, and longings—how eager none can know, except each one for himself; when the last hope fails, and when the aching void and emptiness of the future seem bearing down like the inevitable dusk at the end of a busy day. Darkness and oblivion and death would seem welcome at such times; rather than the dim shadow and grey silence of these sad twilight hours,—dark grey, though the sun is shining perhaps, and the summer lights flooding the land. Then the fight begins: a lonely one, with no witness, for who can see or understand another's mood? And the fight is this: 'I wanted that, I tried for this, I would have been the person that I am not. I would have liked the happiness which is denied me. Give, give, O Lord, unto Thy servant. Is not happiness my right? Is not content my right, and success and love and prosperity?' And even amid the fierce pangs of pain and disappointment the mad question is answered. 'Why should not sorrow and disappointment

be thy right? Why should not the experience of grief be thine? the knowledge of evil as well as of good? Submit, oh, submit, poor heart!' And the spirit seems to speak to the weary body, and one last desperate effort comes for resignation, for obedience to the terrible teaching, for acquiescence. 'We bow to Heaven that willed it so.'

In this frame of mind everything all round about seems to have an answering voice to urge, to help, to comfort. When all seems lost there comes a new courage, a new peace dawning overhead, life bursting from the dry branches, light from the clouds, the very stones cry out and testify in the world all roundabout. Reine, walking homeward along the cliff, read a thousand meanings in the sights along her way—peace, resignation, regret, remembrances more or less aching; but singing a song all the while, which echoed with hitherto undreamt-of meaning: there was comfort in the sound of the sea, in its flowing music, its minor notes, its cries for help, in the rush of wind blowing here and there, in the very moods of her heart changing from one emotion to another. Even the trembling shadow of the poplar-tree upon the turf seemed to whisper peace to her and tranquillity; and so by degrees her sad excitement abated. She did not reproach herself; she did not know now whether she had been most to blame for that which she should regret all her life; but when she reached home, she felt somehow that the worst was over. Little Josette ran up to her, and pulled her by

the hand into the everyday world again, telling her to come and see the galette she and her mother had cooked for dinner; Paris rubbed his head against his mistress's black gown; Madame Marteau came smiling to the door to greet her.

Reine, coming and going about her business with a pale face and a sad heart, all that day kept telling herself that it was too late to regret, but not too late to love still, and then she determined to write to Dick once again; and this time the letter was sent. It was addressed to Catherine, though it was intended for Dick. Only a few words, in the Frenchwoman's quaint stiff handwriting:—'I have heard news of you,' she wrote. 'With my whole heart I pray Heaven for your happiness—that heart which is full of love for you, of hope for the future, and of faith in your tender friendship. You will come here some day—will you not?—both of you, and give me the greatest happiness which I can hope for on earth—the happiness of seeing you happy?'

And then Reine, holding Josette by the hand, went and slipped the letter herself into the box in the village-wall, where it lay until old Pierre, the postman, with his clumsy key and his old worn pouch, carried it away to Bayeux, across the plain.

Dick was sitting with Catherine when this letter was put into her hand. She flushed up, poor little widow, and began to tremble when she read it, and with a sudden

movement half held it out to Butler, and then changed her mind and took it back once more; and so sat, without speaking for a minute, with her dark eyes fixed gravely upon his face. She looked like a child trying to remember some half-forgotten lesson, and Dick wondered what words she was trying to fashion. It was a long, low, old-fashioned room in which they were sitting—the drawing room of a house on the terrace at Richmond, with three deep windows looking out upon the loveliest haze and distance upon the river—wandering at its own sweet will —upon the showers of autumnal gold sparkling beneath the mists that were spreading to the silver hills. Toto and Totty were in one of the windows, whispering and exploding into sudden shrieks of laughter at one another's witticisms. Rosy was curled up over a novel on the floor; and Catherine, sitting in her little bowery corner, with some work and some flowers on her table, was looking prettier and more gentle than ever in her black dress, with her plaintive childish face crowned with the sad dignity of a widow's cap. So she sat talking to the melancholy and ill-humoured young man in the arm-chair beside her. 'You must find me a great bore,' Dick was saying; 'I come and grumble, and abuse everybody and everything. I tried to go back to my painting this morning—confound it, I can do nothing with it: I can do nothing but grumble.' Dick often rode over to see the little widow; he would come in the worst of spirits, and

go away cheered and touched by Madame Fontaine's constant kindness and sympathy. The little woman had learnt out of the depths of her own morbid experiences to be tender and gentle and forbearing with others wandering in the same dreary labyrinth in which she had been utterly lost only a very little while ago; so it seemed to her, looking back. Things were different now, and Catherine could not help wondering why, sometimes, and feeling that to the dearest friend, the tenderest, the most loyal simple heart that ever beat, she owed more than she could ever pay with a lifetime of love and fidelity. She did not feel any particular gratitude to Lady Farebrother, whose money had contributed to the pleasant home and its various luxuries, and was doing more good now than it had ever done in the old lady's lifetime; but the helping hand, the kindness, the protecting love, which first rescued her was Fontaine's, and Catherine did not forget it: one was a chance, the other a blessing. Catherine, sitting there with Reine's letter in her hand, wondered over the many changes and chances of this mortal life. She knew well enough by this time that poor Madame de Tracy was only eager to repair the breach between her and her nephew; that Mrs. Butler and Catherine Beamish were longing to prevent the possible and horrible misalliance that was always hanging over the family: and that they would all have gladly and eagerly consented to a marriage between Madame Fontaine and this terrible Richard. She sadly

wonders why she, a widow woman, is deemed a fitter wife for Dick now, than two years ago, when all her heart's best devotion was his. Catherine felt she loved him still, as some women must love the ideal of their youth—loved him with a gentle, true-hearted friendship and faithful sympathy that would be always his; but not as Reine loved him. Ah! that love was alive, and did not die at its birth. As for Dick himself, he made no profession of affection—he was sincerely fond of Catherine. He was touched—how could he help it?—by the knowledge of her old affection for him. He came, with a longing for sympathy, for a kind soul to talk to, from his empty lonely house to Catherine's tranquil bright home. He came with a sad scorn for himself in his heart; but there he was sitting beside her day after day. She suited him better than his own relations. Reine, whom he had thought true as steel, had deceived him and jilted him. Catherine had but to put out her hand, he was not unwilling; and Catherine, still looking him full in the face, put out her hand—but Reine's little letter was in it.

'Oh, Richard,' Madame Fontaine said, unconsciously calling him by his Christian name. 'I want you to read this, to forgive me for what I am going to say——'

Her eyes were brimming, her voice was failing, but she made a great effort and spoke. Just now everything seemed of very little consequence to her in comparison with the great sadness which had long filled her heart.

There was a pathos in her tones of which she was unconscious, as she tried, by talking as straight and direct to the point as Reine herself might have done, to put away at once, for ever, all misconception. At another time, perhaps, she could not have spoken as she did just then. But her sorrow still encompassed her like a shield; she was invulnerable; a new strength had come to her from her very weakness and remorse for the past.

'I did not love my husband as I ought to have loved him when I married him,' she said. 'I deserve anything —everything. Even this explanation is a punishment for my folly. But if I had to live my life again now, and if I might choose, with open eyes, between the man who loved me and—and—I would not have things otherwise. Oh, Richard, you do not think me ungrateful for speaking? I know all that passed. Poor Reine, dear Reine!' said the true-hearted little woman; 'there is no one so noble, so faithful. She left you because she loved you. Do you know how ill she has been? Miss Williamson' (it was of the present writer that Catherine was speaking then) 'has written to me about her. She thinks she will die some day, if you leave her much longer alone. Oh, Richard, dear friend, won't you forgive her and me, and go back to her again? No one has ever loved you as she does.'

Those of my good friends who already despise Dick Butler, and who think him a poor creature at best, and no

better than his paintings, will, I fear, despise him still more, for his eyes were full of tears when he looked up at last from the paper on which Reine's few words of sad congratulation were standing in black and white before him.

'God bless you, dear lady!' he said, taking Madame Fontaine's outstretched hand, and starting up. 'You have saved me from committing a great wrong. I will write to you to-morrow when I have seen her.'

And then he went away quickly, without noticing the children, and a minute afterwards they heard his horse's feet clattering down the road. Then the three children, who had been listening with all their ears, and perfectly understanding everything, and thrilling with sympathy as children do, came and flung themselves upon the little widow, almost crushing her down upon the sofa.

'No, no, no,' said Toto in his broken English, 'I shall not 'ave you marry. I want you, and when I'm a man' . . . 'Oh, Cathy, you won't leave us again, will you? Promise, please promise,' cried Totty; and Rosa said nothing, but threw away her novel, griped one of Cathy's poor little hands tight in hers, crushing it with all her might, until her sister, half laughing, half crying, had to call out for mercy. And so, with one last bright appealing look, Catherine happily disappears, in the children's adoring but somewhat tyrannical embrace.

Good-by, little Catherine. I can leave you in such a strait without much fear for your future. Toto is your defender; Rosy and Totty your faithful companions; friends and plenty and peaceful leisure are yours now:

> I bow before the noble mind, that freely some great wrong forgives;
> Yet nobler is the one forgiven, who bears that burden well and lives.

Courseulles, where the oysters are preserved, and where the establishment is situated of which poor Fontaine spoke with so much enthusiasm, is a dreary little tumble-down village of odds and ends; of broken barrels, torn garments, oyster-heaps, and swinging shutters, standing upon the border of a great mudmarsh, which at low water reaches out for a mile or more to meet a grey and turbid sea. The oysters are sorted out in long tanks, according to size, and fatten undisturbed, and in their places, round a little counting-house which stands in the middle of these calm and melancholy waters. The shutters swing, in the village a child or two turns over the oyster heaps, the ragged garments flutter in the wind. It is not a place likely to attract mere pleasure-seekers, and yet as Dominique, the day after that little conversation at Richmond, comes leading the horse out of the stable of the inn at Courseulles, he meets a gentleman who has ridden over from Petitport upon M. de Tracy's bay mare, and who quietly asks him to see to the horse, and to tell him where Mademoiselle Chrétien is to be found.